AN EMPIRICAL CHRISTOLOGY

F. PHILIP DIGNAM

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AN EMPIRICAL CHRISTOLOGY

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION	1
I.	RELIGION AND THEOLOGY	1
	Religion as an Experience	1
	Christian Experience	3
	Aim of Theology	4
	Characteristics or Theology	5
	Faith, Theology, and Certainty . .	6
	Failures of Theology	8
	Criteria of Theology	9
	Centrality of Christology	11
	Progress in Theology	13
II.	THEOLOGICAL METHOD	15
	Scientific Tests of Theology . . .	15
	Religious Tests of Theology	23
	Empiricism as a Method	29
	Sources of Christology	34
III.	THE ORIGINAL EXPERIENCE	40
	Importance of Jesus of History . .	40
	Failure of Deductive Approach . . .	41
	Dependability of the Records . . .	43
	Canons of Procedure	44
	The Kingdom of God	46
	The Temptation Experience	59
	The Filial Consiousness	61
	The Son of Man	63
	A New Concept	67
	The Resurrection	71
	Summary	78

IV. THE ORIGINAL EXPERIENCE (Concluded) . . 74

A Twofold Task 74
Moral Quality of Jesus 75
Insight of Jesus 78
His Sense of Values 80
Moral Insight Reflected in Teaching 82
His Teaching and His Life 85
Humanity of Jesus 88

V. INCARNATION 90

Revelation and Emergence 90
God Within and Above 91
Supreme Value 92
Values and Persons 94
Man and God 96
Greek Pantheism 97
Hebrew Moral Categories 98
Substantial Theology 99
Advantages of Hebraic Position . . 100
Clues to Divinity in the Self . . . 101
Freedom and Sin 103
Achievement of Jesus 106
The Cross a New Emergent 107
Incarnation 108

VI. ATONEMENT 111

Theories of the Atonement 111
Vicarious Suffering 113
Atonement as Effective Revelation . 119
Atonement as Judgment 121
Atonement and the Church 125
Objectivity of the Atonement . . . 127
Godward Significance of the Atonement 129
The Challenge of the Cross 132
Summary 134

VII. AN EMPIRICAL CHRISTOLOGY 139

BIBLIOGRAPHY 140

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Religion is the primary concern of man's life. Though the more secular minded might deny this proposition, nevertheless, it stands. Religion in its broader sense- the search for, and devotion to loyalties, is basic to any philosphy of life which we may adopt. As Christians we are united by the conviction that the loyalty men are seeking, and in which they can find the richest life, is the loyalty to God, revealed and implemented by Jesus Christ.

The evangelistic imperative impels us to win others to this conviction by making them keenly aware of their need for this loyalty and by proving to them that the Gospel of Christ can fulfill that need. The most persuasive force in accomplishing these aims is the witness of dedicated lives- the loyalty, the martydom, and the victory of those who already claim allegiance to Christ.

But after the work of these pioneers comes the more prosaic task of formulating intellectually the experience which is theirs, and of pointing the way toward that same experience for others. The Saints and Martyrs are indeed pioneers; the theologian stands as a guide to the way that they have travelled.

The aim of this thesis is to express in terms of human experience the religious significance of Jesus Christ. Because experience is basic to saint

and theologian alike, I have chosen empiricism as my method for the discovery and expression of the truths of Christology. For empiricism looks upon experience as the source of knowledge and the field of endeavor of the seeking mind.

To insure perspective on our task, the first chapter presents a definitive picture of religion and theology in their relation to each other, the relation of a mode of expression to a vital experience.

Chapter II is a consideration of that mode of expression, that is to say, a consideration of theological method. It is an effort to take into account the requirements which scientific thought and religious experience lay upon theology. There follows a discussion of empiricism in relation to these requirements.

Our method having been chosen, we then go on in Chapter III to study the primary date- the life and teachings of Jesus- and derive from them conclusions regarding his character and mission.

Equipped with these conclusions, we turn to the two basic questions of Christology: in what sense was Jesus both human and divine, and what did his life, death, and resurrection accomplish for men in their relation to God? Incarnation

and Atonement, as the hypotheses by which we express the results of empirical investigation, are the subjects of Chapter V and Chapter VI, respectively.

The final chapter is an attempt to sum up the findings and significance of empiricism in the field of Christology.

CHAPTER I

RELIGION AND THEOLOGY

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RELIGION AND THEOLOGY

Religion is an adventure of faith which is rooted in experience. The religious man believes that the evidence indicates that at the heart of the universe there is a union of power and goodness. He commits his life to the proposition that truth, beauty, and goodness, rather than their opposites, are the ultimate reality, and he seeks his destiny in the pursuit of these values through an intimate relationship with the divine being who upholds them. But the ground for this commitment is not mere belief in an intellectual sense; rather it is an experience which involves his whole being. Schleiermacher grasped part of the truth when he said that religion is a "feeling of absolute dependence." A satisfying religious experience involves a high degree of empathy on the part of the individual, and the reference to a higher power connotes dependence. But the experience includes more than feeling. "It is not only something felt but something apprehended."[1] A distinction is to be made between knowing and understanding. The experience is not

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1. John Wright Buckham, Religion as Experience, p. 18.

immediately understood; all of its implications have not been fathomed. But it is apprehended. Its reality is known, and the individual can fit his experience of religion into the general pattern of his life. Feeling that he is under the aegus of a power greater than he has hitherto known, he commits himself by an act of will to a life guided by that power. His aim is to secure the integration of his personality on a level determined by the values associated with that higher power.

> It is this wholeness and awareness that "characterize" experience. Experience is not pure sensation. Neither is it pure reflection. It is thinking, feeling, willing, all in one. It is realisation.[2]

This characterization which Dr. Buckham applies to experience, because its completeness in the case of religious experience, because it is so decisive for human life.

Man's consciousness of his need for the support and guidance of a religious object can lead to a sense of futility if it is not met. It is only when that need is answered that a man enters into the experience of religion.

> The driving power is human need and man's search for satisfaction, but the distinctive element is man's awareness of a higher order of meaning and power, upon which he feels himself dependent, to which he

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2. Buckham, op. cit., p. 14.

> owes reverence and loyalty, in which he trusts for help.[3]

It is such a conception of religion that the theistic postulate of Christianity fulfills. Man as a seeker of ends looks to the religious object for the fulfillment of those ends, his own sense of incompleteness dictating the need for that fulfillment.[4] In the Hebraic-Christian tradition, God is conceived as the transcendent and immanent power responsible for the realisation of value in human life, and the guarantor of the validity of that value. The transcendence of God gives him cosmic authority; his immanence secures the personal significance of a human-divine relationship.

But Christianity has social and historic, as well as personal, implications. Both the religious ideal and its realisation involve a community of persons. The community, guards the concept of the religious experience, helps its members to achieve a fuller realisation of it, and seeks to give force to its implications for human life. And it is this organic, enduring community, whose members are bound together by a common

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3. Harris Franklin Rall, "Theology, Empirical and Christian", in Contemporary American Theology, (Second Series). p. 255.

4. Edwin Lewis, Jesus Christ and the Human Quest, p. 38.

religious experience, which constitutes Christianity and gives it a particular type of unity.

> Regarded historically Christianity is a great movement in the spiritual life of the race. It is a great spiritual stream taking its rise back in the first century of our era, and flowing on down the centuries into our own time. It is not a simple thing, but a complex thing, as all living things are. As such, it has no form of unity and self-identity as an unchanging dogma or an unchanging atom may possess: it has the sort of unity and identity found in all living things, the sort you and I have.[5]

This introduction is not intended as an exhaustive treatment of the nature of religion in three pages. It is merely setting the stage for the introduction of the main character, Theology. Religion is essentially an experience; theology is the attempt to categorise that experience. It was pointed out above that the religious person 'apprehends' his religious experience without necessarily 'understanding' it. The aim of theology is to help him understand it. Christianity is an historic organism, consisting of an ongoing community, united by an experience and a conviction regarding the significance of that experience, and seeking to realise divine values in a temporal life situation. It is the task of theology to formulate the experience, the conviction, and the values in terms of that life situation.

5.James Bissett Pratt, Can We Keep the Faith, p. 28.

Theology constructs the earthen vessels of doctrine in which the divine treasure of religious experience is handed on from one generation to another.

Theology has a double foundation. It stands with one foot set in that realm of experience which is peculiarly religious, whence it derives assurance of the cosmic and divine nature of its treasure; on the other side it is grounded in the general life situation of men at a particular point of time and place. If religion provides the goals and orientation of life, theology must bring out the implications of the religious fact and show the religious man, in terms of his own knowledge and culture, how exactly he is to orient his life toward the goal.

It becomes obvious that theology is not a static discipline. The same God who spoke to the followers of Moses on a tablet of stone, cried out against social oppression in the voice of Amos, and displayed sacrificial love on the Cross of Calvary. But how different was the modus operandi in each case. So it is with theology. There is but one divine truth and experience of it to be grasped. It is this fact which binds together the Christian community. But no theological system can claim the same permanent value.

Theology, as the expression of religion, must be characterized by contemporaneity. Every advance in man's understanding of his temporal milieu provides new modes

of expression for the theologian in dealing with the eternal. It is the very loss of contemporaneity which has deprived the 'Queen of Sciences' of her coveted position. Many of the concepts of thinkers such as Anselm and Aquinas, which were quite relevant to the thought of their day, can no longer challenge thinking men. Theology to be vital must be abreast of its times, taking account of advances in other fields, and carefully deliniating its own field. To the theologian, contemporaneity is not a curse but a necessary characteristic of his work.

Perhaps the philosopher can look upon himself as an artist, producing thought forms of enduring beauty, such that men who have long since abandoned the metaphysics of Plato can still admire the grandeur of his intellectual structure. But the theologian is not an artist; he is an artisan. His task is the functional one of providing an apologetic to the heathen and the sceffer and a religious discipline for the faithful. And the vital test of his work is not whether it will be a thing of beauty generations hence, but whether it works here and now: the test is essentially a pragmatic one. The end of the theologian is not the glorification of his artistry, but the answering of human needs.

The 'Faith once delivered to the saints' was a faith, and not a detailed belief. The categories in which that

faith is expressed must be revised to meet the needs of passing generations. But the change is not only in the mode of expression: there is also change in terms of a better understanding of that faith, and a surer demonstration of its truth. If we believe that man is making any progress at all in the realm of thought, it follows that the new modes of expression of the religious fact can not only be more meaningful for men of their generation, but can also plumb the depths of the meaning of that religious fact more profoundly. There is progress in the field of revelation, or discovery, as well as in the field of expression.

This brings us to the question of certainty in religion. Can theology provide it? The answer is both yes and no. In some respects there is certainty, in others only probability. The individual has confidence in the reality of his religious experience, but when he comes to describe that experience, he may discover that God is 'an oblong purple blur.'

> Certainty derives both from the consciousness of the reality of such experiences and from confidence in the method of describing, analyzing, and placing them in conceptual form. Tentativeness manifestly derives from the fact that the experiences are items of empirical reality, and judgments placed upon them, purporting to reveal their essential quality, must appeal to further experiences for their substantiation, rather than certain truth.[6]

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6. Harold A. Bosley, The Quest For Religious Certainty, p. 122.

The Christian community is convinced by its own experience that the world is somehow different because Jesus of Nazareth lived, and that the lives of his followers are transformed by divine power. This conviction the community holds with certainty; but its intellectual formulations of this conviction possess only probable truth. To the degree that these formularies succeed both in doing justice to the divine fact and in expressing themselves clearly in human terms, they gain in validity.

It is at this point that we can discover the failings of both traditionalism and liberalism. Neither has succeeded in giving the man in the pew an understandable Christology which could serve as the intellectual basis of his faith. Traditional theology started in the clouds and attempted by a system of deductive reasoning to relate its system to man. But it stopped with the Chalcedonian formula and failed to establish contact with him through the discovery of concepts which could convey divine truths and at the same time have a significance for him which arose out of his experience in this world.

When liberals set out to remedy the situation, they took the layman where they found him, in a world of experience which was meaningful, but then they failed to

get him into the clouds. They left him dangling helplessly in midair, not only uncertain as to what the truths of theology were, but also a little doubtful as to whether there were any truths in the field.

Orthodoxy assured man that there was truth in its doctrine, but the fact remained that he was unable to understand it; liberalism assured him that he could understand the truth, if only there was some assurance that the truth was there. The one school failed to give meaningful expression to the experience, and succeeded in doing justice to the expression only by leaving it in enigmatic terms. The other school expressed the experience in terms which the human mind could grasp but failed to do justice to the religious experience which was empirically evident.

The history of theology makes us painfully aware of the fact that we possess our treasure 'in earthen vessels.' As Dr. Van Dusen states the difficulty:

> In the Church's central conviction, the certainty from which all others flow, and upon which they hang, the Church has been utterly satisfied in its soul; it has never achieved an explanation which has satisfied its own mind, let alone the more critical minds of inquirers and scoffers.[7]

The task for theologians of today, as for those who were

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7. Henry Pitney Van Dusen, "The Significance of Jesus Christ", in Liberal Theology, p. 209.

present at the first Pentecost, is to explain a religious experience in terms which will be full of meaning for the contemporary world. To the degree that they succeed, they will both enhance the religious experience of the community and also make the community more attractive to those who are outside it. They will increase the subjective depth and the objective extent of the religious experience they are trying to explain. Their purpose is ever to gain deeper insights into the truths involved in religious experience on the one hand, and, on the other, to secure a greater integration of the facts of that experience with man's experience in general. ". . . for Christian experience, if it is to be valid, must form a coherent part of man's experience in general."[8] Theology is more than the handmaid of religion. It is not condemmed to follow only; it can also lead. Just as Christians within the community are to be a leaven, working to bring their fellow men to a recognition of their true values and goals, so theology must work within the religious community to secure its best orientation.

The criteria by which a theology is to be judged are not just subjective. Theology must be more than a

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8. D. Maill Edwards, "A Christology in Modern Terms", in The Lord of Life, p. 195.

projection of the wish thinking of the Christian community. It must secure the best possible adjustment between religion and life and thus enable the community to 'overcome the world.' In time of cosmic and world despair, Neo-Supernaturalism offers the hope of salvation through irrationality. It has virtually surrendered the vital relationship of the two poles of theology, and consequently is not a gain, but a reversion to a more primitive type of theology.

All that we have said thus far applies to theology in general, but what of Christology in theology. Our conception of God, our ethical pattern of life, our soteriological system, all stem from the figure of Jesus Christ. The agelong battle of scholars over the figure of Jesus, both critically and theologically interpreted, bear witness to his significance for Christian faith. The outcome has been vital to those involved, because on it depended their whole conception of religion and its implications for human life. Historic Christianity has always built upon the proposition that in Jesus' own consciousness, as well as in the minds of the earliest Christians, he was uniquely linked with God and fully capable of meeting every spiritual need of men.

We have said that religion is constituted by a

continuing experience of the individual and of the group. We can go further and say that the peculiarly Christian experience has been an experience of God through Jesus Christ. The categories used in describing that experience have varied from the mysticism of Paul to the legalism of Anselm and the substantial theory of Aquinas. But always the central fact remains: through Christ men come into a new relationship with God which somehow transforms their lives. To hold less than this is to abandon the Christian faith.

In view of this centrality of Jesus Christ in Christian faith, all that we have said of the need for a dynamic theology applies with particular urgency in this field. For if Jesus Christ is to be the basis of Christian living, then we must know all that we can of the nature of his person and thought, and their significance for human life. And from our common world of experience we must draw the categories of expression which will best do justice to his figure. A theology which would enshrine Jesus in outmoded categories is in danger of doing violence to the faith. Though the revelation in Christ may be complete, only the most arrogant thinker would claim to have stated it perfectly.

> The best that any age can do is to make him real for that age, and then to hand on to new ages the ever recurring task of

> understanding Him anew, as human life changes and as new problems call for new solutions. 9

We cannot cut off our historical roots in the field of theology any more than we can in any other field. We must build upon the experience of the past, but we must be willing to accept new categories of thought that the eternal fact may be expressed in contemporary terms.

Progress in the field of theology is comparable to that in other fields of endeavor. Men who accepted a Ptolemaic universe had accounted for the facts as they could observe them, in terms which they could understand. But the concepts of the Copernican system presented a twofold advance. They were more congenial to the thought of their age, and they were truer to the actual facts. Herein are the tests which must be applied to every theological proposition which is propounded, and Christianity will remain a living religion only if its formulation of theology is able to meet these tests successfully. The faith is endangered on the one hand by the forces of reaction which would deny to the intellectual progress of man its rightful place in a contemporary theology, and on the other hand, by an ultra

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9. Edward S. Drown, The Creative Christ, p. 13.

liberalism which would fail to account for the power of a living religious experience which has demonstrated its validity in history. And no external authority can enforce either distorted view on the religious conscience. The only valid authority is that which lies in

> . . . the persuasive appeal to the conscience and reason with confidence in the self-evidencing qualities of truth and its harmony with the constitution of man. If truth is not thus self-evidencing , no external authority in the Church or in the world can ever make it compulsive vital truth to honest men. [10]

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10. S. Angus, Essential Christianity, p. 14-15.

CHAPTER II

THEOLOGICAL METHOD

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THEOLOGICAL METHOD

Having outlined our task as being the expression of an abiding truth in the thought forms of our own age, the next step is the selection of a method. It must naturally be one which can do full justice to the truth which we are trying to express, and also one which will meet the requirements of contemporary intellectual disciplines.

In many quarters there is a current reaction against the emphasis on science in religious thinking, but it cannot be denied its rightful place in any modern theology. For there is a fundamental affinity between science and theology in regard to method. The aim of both is to gather the data of experience and organize it into a meaningful whole on the basis of tested hypotheses. And since none can deny the astounding success of the scientist in his own field of endeavor - his faithfulness to the data, the internal and external consistency of his conclusions - theology may well borrow something of his method and spirit of approach. The fate of those who would ignore the canons of scientific method in their religious thinking is well

illustrated by the plight of those who tried to uphold a non rational type of religion in the conflict between religion and science of a few decades ago. The source of their error was their inability to distinguish between the facts of religion and the modes of their expression. Consequently they confused the two.

The primary requirement of a scientific age is that our thinking be inductive. Douglas Clyde Macintosh, champion of scientific theology, states that his 'fundamental thesis' in the field of religious epistemology is that in religious experience there is a revelation, or discovery, of a divine reality.

> This discovery of a dependable and presumably universally accessible divine reality in and through religious experience involves the possibility of formulating what is discovered about the divine reality (dependable effects on certain conditions) in the forms of laws of empirical theology, and constructing a theory of the religious object or divine reality which shall be, at the heart of it, truly scientific.[1]

This inductive approach to theological method accepts the discovery of science that there is in this world a

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1. Douglas Clyde Macintosh, "Toward a New Untraditional Orthodoxy", in, Contemporary American Theology, Vol. 1, p. 306.

   I would question Macintosh's term, "truly scientific." While theology must be scientific in its approach and method, I doubt that it can ever be "truly scientific." For further development of this point, see page 38.

unitary order. As Newton discovered the law of gravity in the action of a falling apple, so the task of the theologian is to formulate the laws of religion by the observation of religious activity. The distinction between the natural world in which God works by certain law-abiding processes and the supernatural realm in which his mode of operation is without explanation is eliminated. The scientific theologian must begin with particular facts of experience and use them as a basis for formulating concepts which can be tested further in the field of experience. This has not been the method of procedure employed by traditional theology.

The task of Christology has always been the investigation of three affirmations of Christian faith: Jesus was human, he was also divine, and his life, death, and resurrection made a difference in the relations of God and Man. Traditionally theologians have divided their work here, as in other fields, into two sections, 'natural' theology and 'supernatural' theology. Natural theology works with the information which man can discover by the operation of his own intellect. Supernatural theology is concerned with information which God imparts in a special way, the substance of revelation.

Inherent in this conception of a world divided into two realms, one in which God works by natural processes,

the other in which his actions are spectacular and unpredictable, is the danger that the structures of such a theology will become irrelevant. Obviously they are not subject to the tests of science. This tendency of theology in the past to be deductive rather than inductive, to force the facts into the confines of a favorite concept, rather than to follow the direction of the observed facts, has often sidetracked theologians in their search for truth, and has led them to produce systems of religious thought which lacked that integral relation to daily life which is vital to a living religion. Thus the theory that Christ was a ransom to the devil did not grow out of the study of Jesus' life and teachings, but was instead the result of a primitive metaphysic. Consequently, a modern theologian must break with theologians of the traditional school and also of the NeoSupernaturalist school at this point, believing that the Christian religion can be relevant only if this essentially artificial distinction between 'natural' and 'revealed' theology is eliminated.

> What is imperatively needed for the well-being of religion is a basis in experience for a theology which shall be at once both natural and revealed. Such a theology might well retain the vitality of historic religion even while it was attaining the validity of scientific method.[2]

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2. Douglas Clyde Macintosh, Theology as an Empirical Science, p. 106

With its experiential epistemology, empiricism trusts that it has found that basis. Its primary interest is in the activity rather than in the being of God. The key words in its method are experience and behavior. Empiricism is committed to the proposition that we can best learn about God by observing what he does. Only after we have discovered what he does can we begin to formulate hypotheses about his nature.

And clues to the activity of God are not to be sought in some special 'supernatural' realm, but in any revealing area of life. Taking its cue from the New Naturalism, empiricism abandons the realm of the peculiarly supernatural.

> Revelation, for the naturalist, is possible anywhere and anytime there is proper relation between event and appreciation. It is the same as any other knowledge, except for its superior value. It is found and tested in the same way. [3]

When the individual responds to the activity of God, experience can provide the material of revelation without violating the natural laws of the universe. "It is this coincidence of perceiving mind and revealing event which constitutes revelation. [4]

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3. R.C. Miller, "The New Naturalism and Christianity" in The Anglican Theological Review, Vol. XXI, No. 4, Oct. 1939, p. 26.

4. William Temple, Nature, Man, and God, p. 312.

It is based upon experience, in our tradition upon Christian experience.

Obviously this understanding of revelation stems from a different conception of God's relationship to the world than that which traditional theology has held. For the distinction between the natural and the supernatural has applied not just to revelation, but to all of God's activities in his dealing with men. This conception the empiricist replaces with a sense of the unity of God and his world. God is discovered in the natural processes, in the dynamics of society and in the creative activity of the world. It is here that man can find a revelation of God; not in beholding a God breaking his own laws, but in an understanding of those laws and of the way in which God and man can work through them to build a better world.

> God is to be found in the natural world . . . God is wholly other than the natural order, and yet he pervades the natural order. He is not identical with humanity, but he can be discovered, working, and therefore present, in the hearts of men. God is superhuman, and transcends all that humanity may do itself. As a 'creative synthesis,' he is the persuasive guide of all that is, and yet he is other without going beyond it. [5]

With regard to the understanding of revelation, this conception is seen developing in the Bible. Earlier

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5. Ibid., p. 27.

writers feel that the transcendence of God must reveal itself in extraordinary physical acts. But with the prophets comes the emphasis upon the moral transcendence of God, with God speaking to men primarily in terms of their insights.

> As religion becomes a "morality" conditioned personal relation, revelation means increasingly person speaking to person, truth to reason, righteousness to conscience, mercy to sin and man's needs. . . Men are summoned to see God, not in the isolated and unusual, but in human history, in human experience. [6]

And certainly the prophets could never be accused of losing sight of the fact of God's transcendence. The question is whether God's transcendence is one which envelops all the moral and spiritual aspirations of man, or one which separates him from their strivings. The prophets chose the former conception.

> There is no mutual exclusion of divine and human; God is found in the insights and experiences of man, and man finds God not in passive submission but in the active response of the sensitive and sympathetic heart, the alert understanding, and the obedient will. Revelation and discovery are thus different aspects of one process. [7]

There is then but one world. It is entirely supernatural,

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6. Harris Franklin Rall, Christianity, p. 154.

7. Ibid., p. 155.

in the sense that it is the realm of God's activity. But it is natural, in the sense that it is through the natural processes, both moral and physical, that God works to attain his ends. And the man who understands these processes in relation to the ends has come into the realm of revelation.

The relation of theology to life gives the clue to another requirement which our age makes of this study. It must be functional. Any Christology must be expressed in terms of the life situation of the faithful Christian, so that he can make it the basis of the 'more abundant life.' The new view of the world as a unitary organism throughout which God is at work, not being confined to a 'supernatural' realm, makes it imperative that the theologian express his findings in terms of the whole life of man. The cleaveage between the natural and the supernatural, between the thing which God has done and the life which man now lives has too often made religion appear as a somewhat artificial reality, detached from the vital interests of daily life. But to the modern thinker, our world is the result of dynamic forces.

> God is not simply a word spoken from above, or a power entering from without, or the one-time Creator of the universe; he is in his world and in the movements of our time as action working for human redemption, as truth waiting to be discerned. 8

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8. Harris Franklin Rall, Christianity, p. 91.

The task of the theologian is not to show how Christ satisfied the desires of either God or the devil in the past, but how he reconciles the world to God today.

But though a theology be both inductively discovered and functionally expressed, it can still be defective, unless another test of the scientist is applied: it must be pragmatically tested. The law of gravity is tested by falling bodies and the power of attraction between bodies. The validity of a Christology and of theories concerning the Atonement can be shown only in the lives of those to whom they have been the means of redemption and peace. Every fact, whether its source be Scripture, history, or contemporary experience, must be tested for internal consistency and agreement with the other evidence, before it can become the basis of a theory. And the theory must be tested again for agreement with the facts and effectiveness in action, before it is finally accepted.

These are the external guides to a scientific theology. It must be inductive, functional, and pragmatic. They are not derived from the nature of the religious object which we are to study; they are the canons of clear thinking in a scientific age. They are to be applied in our study of the actions of the religious object. But alone they do not determine which are the activities of the religious object and which are the imaginings of the religious mind. Indeed, there is many a critic of religion

who would say that every theological construct is the result of imagination. But, as Dr. Robinson points out, the reasons for our acceptance of the reality of the physical world are valid also for the spiritual reality. We can use them to prove the reality of the values realised by the intercourse of a personality with God.

> Persistence, congruity, and agreement-these are the foundations of my acceptance of the external world. But in what respect are they wanting to the testimonies of the religious consciousness? It is the persistence of a moral or religious impression which alone secures its often unwilling acceptance as authoritative. It is the contruity of its results with the whole experience of life-the pragmatic test, 'by their fruits'-with which no religious faith can for long dispense. As for the confirmation of 'agreement', the practical universality of a religious consciousness of some kind or other is one of the most striking features of human experience.[9]

Dr. Robinson is using his argument to prove the validity of the religious consciousness in general; we can go further and apply the same tests to the particular result of the activity of that consciousness. That is to say, a fact is allowed a place in the theological construct only if it is a persistent element in religious experience, fits into the general picture of life and the harmonious adjustment of the soul, and can be ex-

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9. H. Wheeler Robinson, Redemption and Revelation, p.13.

perienced by others in the community. The first tests are entirely external to the subject and determine the manner in which we are to consider our material. The second delimit the field, determining what is or is not a part of that material.

But when all this has been said, the fact remains that the primary purpose of the theologian is not to make people happy, or to give them something which they can use, but to express the truth. He is trying to gather the facts of religious experience, in our case those which have a bearing on the person of Christ, and express them in concepts and theories. But the final test of a theory is more fundamental than the pragmatic. We want to know whether the theory has cosmic and spiritual reality, whether it expresses an actual truth. The seeker after truth goes to the very basis of the theological structure, and asks whether, granted that the material of the theologian can be calssified as valid religious experience, granted that it points to the nature of the religious object called God, has God been established as a fact? Theologians work industriously to produce systems which will help man to understand God and his ways, but meanwhile how can the layman know God. If no finality has been reached in the field of theology, how can he be assured of the reality of God?

And the answer to this question is both scientific and unscientific. Through common sense we know the things of our physical world, but we do not understand them. Scientists might be inclined to laugh at a layman's common sense description of a color. And the scientist's description would be much more accurate. But the scientist would not deny the reality of that which the layman was trying, however inaccurately, to describe. And he would be the first to admit that his own description was far from complete. But the fact remains that both he and the layman are aware of the existence of color before either of them can completely understand or analyse it. The beginning for both of them is unscientific.

> It is in this extra-scientific way that we know God. We are acquainted with certain masses of experience which have as an ingredient that which is more important for the safety and growth of human life than anything else, though we are unable to specify just what it is. That object is God, because the word God signifies such an object, whether known or unknown.[10]

Christology is an attempt to understand the person of Jesus Christ and his relation to that object and his mediation of it to the world. And in a sense Jesus himself is the norm and the standard of judgment, since

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10. Henry Nelson Wieman, Religious Experience and the Scientific Method, p. 175.

men have found in him more of the divine factor of life than they have in any other person. When Pilate asked of Jesus,"And what is truth?" he could not answer, for Pilate was blind to the fact that truth incarnate stood before him.

Sufficiently to delimit the field of theology, we must point out that all experience is not religious experience. Before we begin to gather the data of experience, the raw material for a Christoloty, we must ascertain the criteria by which that experience is to be judged. And the primary criterion by which we judge experiences is value.

> A value is a quality which anything has by virtue of its relation to an end-directed process, that is, a process regarded as working toward an end, whether the end be consciously contemplated in the process, or not. [11]

An experience then possesses value, and can be classified as religious experience, if it is part of the process which is working toward God's ends.

> Revelation is a form of experience in which a particularly sensitive mind grasps the significance of events which might be overlooked by the less appreciative. [12]

In other words, when revelation takes place, the appreciat-

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11. Douglas Clyde Macintosh,"Experimental Realism in Religion" in Religious Realism, p. 308.

12. R.C. Miller, What We Can Believe, p. 213.

ive mind gains insight into the value inherent in those events. When the prophet Jeremiah cries out, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," he is the recipient of a revelation. He has examined the component parts of the social situation which he faces and has concluded that death is the inevitable reward of sin. He has discovered the value in that situation, namely, its relation to that process by which God would establish his justice in the world.

> This world of values . . . is our way to the highest knowledge of God because it is here rather than in some mystic sense of divine transcendence or in some vision of power in nature that the character of God is discerned. [13]

By our relation to values we come into fellowship with God in the doing of his work and the seeking of his ends.

An empirical Christology will take as its raw material those experiences of the historic Jesus and of men in their relation to him which are most productive of value, which are most intimately related to the love and mercy, the justice and grace of God. Here is the logical starting point for our intellectual upreach to God, even if we were not working specifically on Christology. For man himself must be the clue to any divinity

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13. Rall, op. cit., p. 193.

which is to have meaning for him.

> God is good, and the goodness of God is of the same kind, whatever its degree, as that which we know in our highest human experiences. [14]

And since, at least within the Christian community, all would agree that Jesus is the highest example of human achievement, he is the natural starting point of our investigation.

All that we have said thus far of the kind of a theological method which our contemporary world and the religious object demand, points to empiricism as the logical method of procedure. Simply stated, it "means that knowledge is based upon the critical and appreciative interpretation of our common human experiences." [15]

As Dr. Miller outlines the method, it consists of five steps:

1. The gathering of material from direct experience.
2. Observation and analysis of experimental behavior.
3. Formulation of concepts and hypotheses.
4. "the concept is tested by its internal consistency, its coherence with the generally accepted body of knowledge, its pragmatic value, and its relation to the original direct experience:"

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14. Harris Franklin Rall, "Theology Empirical and Christian", in Contemporary American Theology, Vol. II, p. 253.

15. Randolph Crump Miller, What we Can Believe, p. lx.

5. Construction of rational inferences to give final form to the concepts.[16]

This is the ideal procedure toward which the empirical method always strives, but obviously in practice the ideal cannot always be realised, especially in the case of the subject at hand. The material of direct experience must sometimes be derived from records only, and observation and analysis of experimental behavior is difficult at best in this field. But these limitations should not lead us to abandon the method, since the alternative is to throw reason out the window. Other fields of endeavor beside theology are subject to the same limitations.

We might also say a word about the fifth step in the method. A strict and rigorous empiricism, such as that of Henry Nelson Wieman, always ends at this point. Nothing beyond rational inferences may be included in such a system. However, less strict empiricists such as Douglas Clyde Macintosh, allow room for 'reasonable beliefs' and 'permissable surmises.' These might be included as steps six and seven in the method as outlined above. Obviously they involve deductive reasoning and are not entitled to acceptance on the same footing as the material of the first five steps. However, if they

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16. Randolph Crump Miller, "Empiricism and Analogical Theology", in Christendom, Vol. V, No. 3, p. 399

are entirely consistent with experientially grounded concepts, and if we bear in mind their tentative character they can be allowed a place. Such a tentative acceptance of 'reasonable beliefs' and 'permissable surmises' helps to round out our system, and at the same time does not deprive it of the corrective test of experience.

It is important at this point to recognize what is the most basic element in empiricism.

> Empiricism . . is no simple cut and dried method which can be lifted out of one sphere of study and set down in another. It is simply the open mind and the demand that our knowing be constantly guided by reference to the concrete reality which all men may experience or observe. [17]

Dr. Rall's attitude is almost an oversimplification, but it does present the essentials of empirical procedure, namely, that our minds be open, and that experience be our guide.

This method satisfies the requirements laid down above. It is inductive in that it starts from the actual facts of experience. It strives to express those facts in functional concepts, and it seeks a pragmatic verification of those concepts. Now we may well ask whether the theory which is its final result is true. And we may answer

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17. Harris Franklin Rall, "Theology, Empirical and Christian", in Contemporary American Theology, Vol. II, p. 263

that its description of the religious object is as true as any scientific hypothesis can be. It describes God in terms of what God does, since its basic conviction is that here is the most reliable and only available source of knowledge about God. Hypotheses which go beyond this point and describe God in terms of his nature are admissable as over beliefs or rational hypotheses, but cannot be placed on the same footing with discovered facts and the concepts directly based on them.

It may appear at this point that the empirical theologian is faced with a dilemma. Can he be both Christian and empirical? It would seem that he must either accept the Christian affirmations and reject any empirical evidence to the contrary, or else make his commitment of faith only tentative and if the empirical facts make it necessary, reject his Christian faith entirely.

This dilemma might hold true if it were not for the fact that faith precedes theology. A man explores the depths of Christian theology only because he is first committed to the Christian faith. But by the word 'faith', I do not mean the "faith once delivered to the saints', as a body of concrete dogma, or a set of ultimate conclusions, beyond which man cannot progress. Rather I mean the kind of faith which begins with the

elementary way of knowing discussed above. There is an awareness of a higher order in the world, manifesting itself in human life in the form of certain values which we call divine. Added to this is the conviction that in Jesus Christ man can discover more about that divine value than anywhere else, and the commitment of his life to the pursuit of that truth and the integration of his life around it. But at this point man does not have to surrender his open mind. He can still employ the empirical method, as outlined above, to discover more of that truth and formulate it ever more clearly.

We cannot overlook the fact that knowledge without bias is impossible, even though that bias manifest itself only in terms of the selection of certain of the material of experience as being worthy of investigation. So the empiricist believes that the facts which gave rise to the Christian tradition possess unique religious experience, and are therefore worthy of investigation. "Thus, the findings of the empiricist are important in establishing both the true and the false in the inherited tradition." 18

Whence will the empirical theologian go for this

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18. R. C. Miller, "Empirical Method and its Critics", in Anglican Theological Review, Vol. XXVII, No. 1, January, 1945, p. 30.

religious experience which is to form the material of his concepts? Traditional theology has derived its material of revelation from three sources:

> the authority of Scripture, religious experience, and the philosophical theories which formed the intellectual background."[19]

Religious experience is the reason for, and the basis of, all theology.

Scripture itself is simply the record of such religious experience. Its down fall as an absolute authority in the field of religion, deserving of slavish adherence to the letter, came when men discovered that many of the facts related therein could not be reconciled with their own comparable experiences. And Scripture has retained its authority insofar as it expresses truths, which, while remaining true to the experience of men, possess outstanding significance and value. Therein are enshrined the fruits of the religious experiences of men of unusual religious insight, men who had a unique vision of the relation of the divine values which are evident in the world to the ultimate divine reality.

From the empirical point of view, the religious authority of any writing is subject to this test: insofar

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19. W.R. Matthews, God in Christian Thought and Experience, p. 112.

as it strikes an experiencial affinity with the reader, it is alive and meaningful. This is the fundamental postulate of an empirical canon. To deny it is to deny that the Bible can possess any authority in an age of scientific criticism. It is for the Biblical critic to to distill the actual experience from the writing; it remains for the theologian to evaluate the experience in terms of the light which it throws upon religious knowledge.

> The authority of the Bible stems not from its position as a sacred book, but rather from the primary authority of the religious experience recorded therein.[20]

It is in light of this principle that an empirical theology employs the Scriptural evidence. This is in fact the basis upon which the Christian community decided which books should have a place in its canon. The emphasis upon Apostolic authorship as a qualification represented a desire to get as close as possible to the original experience.

As stated earlier in this chapter, the key word to the philosophical structure of our empirical Christology, is value. It was pointed out that this is the quality which an experience possesses by reason of its relation

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20. D. Elton Trueblood, The Knowledge of God, p. 7.

to the achievement of a God-sougnt end. Our philosophical approach then must be dynamic; it precludes the possibility of a close system. The more significant data of experience which we can gather and evaluate, the clearer will our picture of reality be.

As science has certain implications for our method of securing material, it has implications for the philosophical form in which we express our findings. For the present confusion in the field of philosophy is inevitably linked to the tremendous widening of experience which science has brought about. [21] It has both increased the extent of known experience and also eliminated many of the basic assumptions on which earlier theologians constructed their neat systems, which explained God, the world, and man, through a process of deductive reasoning. The result has been that we have more material of experience with which to work and also a better understanding of it; but a correlary result is that we realise that the final depths of experience have not been plumbed, and we cannot be sure of its ultimate extent.

The modern age has been characterised by complexity and confusion. The universe is seen to be so extensively

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21. Matthews, op. cit., p. 115.

vast and so intensively complex, that simple metaphysical systems are no longer sufficient to explain it. The culminating blow has been science's discovery that it may not be able to ascertain ultimate truth, even about the universe. Science "is impelled to conceive the universe as expressable in equations, or to use Professor Eddington's phrase " a series of pointer readings." [22] Progress in the search for truth is on a 'touch and go' basis. Man is driven to a deep sense of humility, as he is forced to realise the essential incompleteness of his thought systems. He must recognise that they can be made more perfect only as the "pointer readings" give him a clearer picture of his universe.

In the field of empirical theology, this means that anything approaching a system of values can be constructed only after we have analysed enough experience to determine value norms. Our philosophical system as a source of theology will depend for its effectiveness upon widening experience. And whatever we put forth at the moment must therefore partake of the quality of tentativeness.

> The tenets of empiricism, being inductive, are always tentative. There is a practical certainty about them, but as the data are never complete and as the concepts are formulated within specific human situations, there is a relativity about the

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22. Ibid., p. 118.

> concepts as they are fitted into the general scheme of empirical knowledge. [23]

This quality of the empirical method is at once both an advantage and a limitation. Because relativity and tentativeness characterise its findings, it produces no theology which will appeal to the man who seeks passive security in the enjoyment of his religion. But, on the other hand, this fact makes empiricism a child of the modern age. The empiricist talks in terms which the modern thinker can understand, and he does not arrogantly assume that he has already catalogued all of the truth about God. His theology is dynamic, and offers man a vital and adventurous religion, one which has no fear that it will be discredited by the intellectual advance of the world.

Empirical theology seeks to enhance, rather than to destroy true orthodoxy, for by definition orthodoxy is truth. Its aim is to make formulations of the Christian religion more faithful to the fact, by grounding it firmly in man's experience of God. Because it tries to pursue its task in a scientific manner, it does not follow that empirical theology is a science. The keynotes of science are impartiality and disinterestedness. It seeks 'truth for truth's sake.' Theology, however,

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23. R.C. Miller, "Empiricism and Analogical Theology" in Christendom, Vol. V, No. 3, p. 399.

seeks truth in order that man may adjust to it in terms of the divine values which he can pursue. Theology has at least one presupposition, that truth is meaningful. Without that presupposition, theology could not embark upon its task. The theologian is convinced that man's experience points to an ultimate reality, and he seeks to categorize that experience and give at least some clue to reality. Though he can be scientific in his methods, and take account of the tentative character which must attach to all hypotheses which he may hazard on the basis of that experience, he can have nothing of the disinterestedness of the true scientist. The scientist looks at his 'pointer readings' objectively only; the theologian asks what bearing they have on man's relation to God.

CHAPTER III

THE ORIGINAL EXPERIENCE

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Our first evidence, both from point of view of time and also of importance, must be the Jesus of history. If the once popular and now discredited Christ-myth theory had been proved true, there could be no Christian religion. For, "The Christian faith in God rests squarely upon what God did in the historical Jesus."[1] Religious faith includes more than the belief that a set of ethical teachings represent an ideal norm; it is not a matter of ideas only. There is also the necessity that those ideals have been actualized in history, that they have been expressed in a person. Only when ideas become incarnate in living persons can they have standing as a religion.[2] And this is especially true in the case of Christianity. What have been historically the central affirmations of Christian faith - that Jesus was human, that he was divine, and that his life, death, and resurrection, have made a difference in man's relation to God - all hinge on the character of Jesus and on the fact that character possesses real historicity.

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1. Floyd V. Filson, One Lord One Faith, p. 127.
2. Edward S. Brown, The Creative Christ, p. 74.

Our inductive method of investigation as well as the nature of religious faith dictates that the historic Jesus be the starting point of our study. We begin with the facts of his life and the content of his teaching as they can be derived from the Synoptic Gospels, by common agreement the most accurate records which we possess of that information.

> The scientific method . . . sets out from the data of experience and its general ideas are reached in the attempt to interpret what is given.[3]

This information is primary empirical data. Any further concepts we may employ to enlarge upon our understanding of Jesus must rest upon this primary evidence and must be recognized as extensions which go beyond the bounds of a rigorous empiricism.

The error of many earlier Christologies lay in their failure at this point. The process of thought began, not with the historical evidence, but with a philosophical concept into which the historic Jesus was obliged to fit. The result has usually been a picture which is obviously contrary to the records which all can read. So it was with the formula of Chalcedon.

> One of the lasting defects of even the classical Christologies since Paul's day is that they have been built, not on the life of Jesus,

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3. W.R. Matthews, God in Christian Thought and Experience, pp. 45-6.

> but on a theory of redemption which did not in its main features derive from Jesus, but was shaped rather by the prevailing philosophy of the age.[4]

Thus it was that the authors of the Chalcedonian Formula set out, not to interpret the evidence gained from a study of the Jesus of history, but rather to make certain assertions about the person of Jesus in terms of a metaphysics of substance. They omitted the first step, that of seeking the evidence of divinity "in the spiritual and moral quality of his character."[5] In view of the historical background of the formula, we can understand this process of thought more clearly. Their aim was to save the great affirmations of faith from destruction at the hands of heretics. From this point of view, the formula was a success. However, when the Renaissance overthrew the metaphysics of substance, the Church still clung to its interpretation which was based upon it, and the result "was a great gulf fixed between religion and culture which, for the larger part of the Christian world, has continued down to our very day."[6]

The solution lies in the recognition of the formula of Chalcedon for what it was - a temporary safeguard of

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4. S. Angus, Essential Christianity, p. 109.

5. Cecil John Cadoux, The Case For Evangelical Modernism, p. 121.

6. George Tolover Tolson, The Renaissance of Jesus, p. 54.

the faith which should not be retained as a strait-jacket for modern thought on the subject. Today it stands as evidence for the fact that only on the basis of experientially grounded and inductively established concepts can we hope to erect a Christology which will be faithful to Jesus himself.

> If the Christian reflection of Jesus is not to degenerate into an extravagant, phantastic gnosis, then it must be reflection on him who was Jesus of Nazareth in history.[7]

Our first step then will be to get as close as we can to Jesus' own conception of his mission, by means of a critical use of the Synoptic Gospels. To say that these records are lacking in historical material dependable enough for such a procedure is to deny the possibility of a Christology which is in any sense rational. And such a denial is by no means necessary. Such a critical scholar as C.C. McCown assures us that,

> Such a flight from reality is as unnecessary as it is useless. Jesus has not been smothered in the statistics of Synoptic studies or under the type labels of form criticism. . . . The historical Jesus is not swallowed up in biased Apostolic propaganda for the Gospel. The Gospels contain, not merely the Apostolic faith in an already idealized, mystical Christ, but also a record, meager, but vivid and vital, based upon authentic and largely trustworthy tradition, about a Jesus who actually lived in

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7. Deissmann, Mysterium Christi, p. 26f; Quoted in Angus, op. cit., p. 108.

> Palestine nineteen hundred years ago. The Gospels are not merely cult ritual, catechism, and kerygma. They contain all three, but also unimpeachable reminiscence. Historicism, in the sense of historical uncertainty, is not a menace to religion. 8

If we have any faith that God is working out his purposes in history, then it is to the records of history that we must go for our primary evidence of his activity. And the Synoptic Gospels are records sufficiently accurate for our investigation.

And after the Synoptics, we can go on to weigh the evidence of the other New Testament writings, representing as they do, somewhat later impressions of Jesus. And we cannot overlook either, the witness of the Christian community, testifying to the influence of this man's life upon human history. In all of these fields we will be looking for teachings of Jesus about himself and their effect upon his contemporaries, and also for any implications of his words which will help us to understand his concept of mission and form our own estimate of his mission. And in our efforts to get at Jesus' own thought, we will do well to bear in mind the three canons which T.R. Glover lays down as a requirement for the study of any human character:

1. " . . give the man's words his own meaning."

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8. Chester Charlton McCown, The Search For the Real Jesus, pp. 305-6.

2. "Make sure of the experience behind the thought. How does a man come to think and feel as he does."

3. "Ask of what type and of what dimensions the nature must be, that is capable of that experience and of that language." [9]

These steps indicate a progression from factual knowledge to conceptual understanding. And this is the course of empirical investigation.

The first quality which we observe when we encounter the historical Jesus in the pages of the Synoptics is a rather general impression. There is the note of urgency, there is the feeling that here is a man with a mission to perform. Towns are visited, words are spoken, the work of a ministry is begun, but no great work is brought to actual completion. Jesus is like a man sowing seed, anxious to scatter it as far as possible in his life time, but having a confidence that someone else will bring to completion the work thus begun. The only conclusion is that Jesus was conscious of some sort of vocation, bound up with the work of God in this world.

Others were also aware of the unique mission of Jesus and the authority which went with it. His purity was such that Simon Peter at their first meeting fell to his knees with the cry, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." Men who were in that mental anguish which was interpreted by

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9. T.R. Glover, The Jesus Of History, pp. 18-20.

their age as demon possession became calm and serene when they heard his words of assurance. Those who rejected his demand that the spirit of righteous love should motivate every word and act either fled his presence or conspired against him. This evidence of power over the souls of men, combined with his authoritative expressions in the field of morals and religion bespeak a man conscious of a vocation bestowed upon him by God himself.

But this first impression, to be valid, must be understood in terms which would be meaningful to Jesus and the men of his day. The question is, how did Jesus conceive of God's purpose, and what did he consider to be his place in its fulfillment?

Once we have stated that question, we are brought to a consideration of Jesus' teaching about the Reign of God, for it is here that we find the very core of his thought.

> The most important, because the most inclusive, of Jesus' characteristic ideas is undoubtedly his conception of the kingdom of God. A casual reading of the Synoptic Gospels will disclose how constantly Jesus used that phrase, and if we understood all that he meant by it, we should hold the clue to the understanding of all his teaching. [10]

It is within this context that he expresses his moral insights and calls upon men to turn to God. And it is plain that he understood the whole purpose of his ministry in relation to this thing that God was going to bring about.

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10. John Knox, The Man Christ Jesus, p. 37.

The very first words put into the mouth of Jesus by the author of Mark emphasise the primacy of the idea of the reign of God.

> The time has come and the reign of God is near; repent, and believe the good news. MK 1:15

The nearness of the reign may be interpreted as being either spatial or temporal. Either the reign of God is already present in the world and men fail to perceive it because they are unprepared, or else the reign is coming in the near future.

But the nature of the statement seems to indicate that the latter view is the correct one, especially when we remember the eschatological background of Jesus and his listeners. That is the conclusion reached by Henry Burton Sharman who says, "Read in the light of the expectation of the age in which the document MK was fashioned, these words of summary from the framer of the document would seem to bear one interpretation only."[11]

We have here a logical rather than a chronological beginning of the record. We can hardly expect

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11. Henry Burton Sharman, The Teaching of Jesus About the Future, p. 304.

that these are the words with which Jesus began his ministry. The material which Matthew and Luke have in common does not picture such a beginning, and the Gospel of Mark does not revert to this theme until 9:1 which probably came much later in the ministry. Remembering also the hesitancy of Jesus upon so many occasions to speak directly of Messiahship, we can conclude that this statement is more likely intended to be an editorial summary of the whole mission and message of Jesus.

All of the parables of growing things can be interpreted without doing violence to the idea of the coming of the kingdom in the very near future. Easton makes the point that the parables deal, not with growth over a long period of years, but rather with seeds which produce full grown plants in a short time.[12] Therefore, they cannot be cited as evidence for a kingdom which is to come gradually. Rather the conception therein contained is consistent with that supported by all the apocalyptic writers. Once God has begun the process, he will bring it quickly to completion. This interpretation makes Jesus' teaching here consistent with his statements elsewhere

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12. Burton Scott Easton, Christ in the Gospels, p 160.

in which he asserts that the kingdom will come before the death of some of his listeners. And it also keeps Jesus within the framework of Jewish eschatological thought. To the Jewish mind the kingdom of God was in no sense the result of evolutionary forces; it represented a break in the continuity of history with which the absolute reign of God would be instituted.[13]

The Reign of God to Jesus represented a future act of God conceived in eschatological terms. However, he made certain significant departures from the thinking of his Jewish contemporaries in the use of those terms. He expected, as they did, that a great eschatological drama would be enacted, featured by the arrival of the Son of Man and the final judgment. But he paints no graphic pictures of the tortures of hell and the bliss of heaven.

> The oracular and esoteric note is completely lacking in the few prophecies of the future which can be ascribed to him with any probability. In fact he repudiates all representations of of the kingdom which human imagination can create, when he says,
>
> > When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven. (Mark 12:25)

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13. Ibid., p. 162

> In other words, men are forbidden to make any picture of the future life. Jesus thus rejects the whole content of apocalyptic speculation, as he rejects also the calculation of the time and the watching for signs. . . [14]

Jewish writers before Jesus had equated the Kingdom of God with the Jewish Kingdom itself (Daniel 2:44, 7:27). The eschaton was to involve a political restoration of the Jewish nation, with the return of the tribes to the holy land and by implication the overthrow of the Roman rule. [15] This is the second point at which Jesus disagrees with the traditional conception. The advent of the kingdom will not be marked by political restoration, but by the fulfillment of God's will upon earth. The kingdom is not for the Jews as a nation, but for those who repent and turn to God.

> There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and yourselves cast out. From east and west, from north and south shall men come, and sit down to eat in the Kingdom of God. (Luke 13:28, 29)

Jesus brings out of the eschatological hope of his people a central religious truth. The fulfillment of God's will and the realisation of men's hope is to be conceived in moral categories and is open to men who can pass the moral test.

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14. Rudolf Bultmann, "The Kingdom Of God," in Contemporary Thinking About Jesus, p. 303.

15. Ibid., p. 304.

Though the kingdom is primarily an eschatological hope, it is also in some sense a present reality.

It is recorded in Luke 7:28 that Jesus said of John, "I tell you, among men born of women there is none greater than John; and yet those who are of little importance in the Kingdom of God are greater than he." Jesus assigns to John a position of primacy among all the great prophets who have preceded them, but he indicates that a new order has begun with his own teaching, as seen in the use of the present tense in which that high position does not hold. ". . he is the greatest of the men in the old order, but he belongs to that dying order and is for that reason inferior."[16] Surely after paying John such a high tribute Jesus does not intend to deny him a future reward. He says elsewhere that the patriarchs are to share in the kingdom, and yet John is superior to them. We can only conclude that Jesus believed that the reign of God had already, to a degree at least, begun. John will receive his reward at the time of the resurrection, but meanwhile a new age has arrived. In Luke 16:16 the transition is very definite.

> Until John came, it was the Law and the Prophets. From that time the kingdom of God has been proclaimed.

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16. C.G. Montefiore, The Synoptic Gospels, p. 428.

> " Thus the breach between the old
> era and the new era is great.
> The first is the era of the Law;
> the second of the Kingdom." [17]

In the mind of Jesus, to the degree that the kingdom was already present, it was linked with his own activities.

> But if it is with the finger of God
> that I am driving the demons out,
> then the Kingdom of God has over-
> taken you. Luke 11:20

Johahn Weiss interprets the phrase, " . . for the Kingdom of God is among you,"to mean the beginning of the victory over Satan who is already falling, and Sharman agrees that it refers to the present realisation of the Kingdom. "In his own words and works, in the life of the little community which had formed about him, the Kingdom had already been manifested."[18] Its full realisation awaits the eschaton, but even now it can be seen in anticipation by those who are ready. The kingdom is present among men to the extent that they have repented and turned to God, that is to say, insofar as they have fulfilled their part in its establishment. God is ready to give men the kingdom, and its ultimate arrival is assured, as the parables of the sower, the mustard seed, and leaven

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17. Ibid., p. 535

18. John Knox, op. cit., p. 41

illustrate; the responsibility lays heavily upon men to prepare themselves. [19]

Whether the advent of the kingdom is conceived as a present reality or as a future consummation, men as well as God have a significant part to play in it. They can determine by their response to the message of the kingdom whether they will be partakers of it. The instructions to the disciples, according to Luke, include:

> When you come to a town and they welcome you, eat what is offered you, and cure the sick there, and say to them, 'The Kingdom of God is close upon you!' But whenever you come to a town and they do not welcome you, go out into the open streets and say, 'The very dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off in protest. But understand this: The Kingdom of God is at hand.' Luke 10:9-11.

They can be partakers if they are willing, but regardless of their attitude they cannot hinder the realisation of the Kingdom.

The two basic strains in the thought of Jesus about the kingdom are now evident. On the one hand is the idea of the kingdom here and developing; on the other hand, the kingdom is the gift of God which is to be bestowed upon righteous men at some future date. Ernest W. Parsons points out that these two aspects of the kingdom teaching are to be seen in the phrase of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy

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19. Joseph Klausner, Jesus of Nazareth, p. 404.

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kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The first part refers to the catastrophic end of the age, the second to the rule of God as a condition of life in the present world.[20] The first is apocalyptic in its emphasis, the second is ethical.

In seeking the solution of this problem, we are driven to the conclusion that the more fundamental meaning which attaches to Jesus' use of the term, kingdom of God, is the eschatological. The evidence in favor of this decision is first of all the great number of passages which obviously refer to the future coming of the kingdom. We are hard put to find a few passages referring to the present kingdom. Added to this numerical proof is the fact of the historical background of Jesus. The terms which he employed had an eschatological connotation for his Jewish listeners.[21] No doubt Jesus was moved to speak of the kingdom as already beginning in the moments when he especially felt the power of God working through himself.[22] At such times he perceived the beginning of the overthrow of Satan which, when comple-

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20. Ernest William Parsons, The Religion of the New Testament, pp. 13-14.

21. Shailer Mathews, The Messianic Hope in the New Testament, p. 80.

22. Edward Increase Bosworth, The Life and Teachings of Jesus, p. 247.

ted, would usher in the kingdom. Inroads are made on the power of Satan when Jesus gives his disciples power to cast out demons (Mk 3:15) and they return with tidings of success (Lk 10:17) which inspire Jesus with new confidence (Lk 10:18-20). But these were only intimations of the coming; when the kingdom actually arrived, it would be by the sudden act of God. Jesus' basic conception of the kingdom was eschatological. [23]

Though Jesus conceived of the kingdom eschatologically, eschatology was not the most important element of his understanding of the kingdom and of man's relation to God. It is in the field of ethics, the nature of the preparation of the individual for entrance into the kingdom, that we find his most important contribution to religious thought. The eschatological form remained as the framework of his thought,[24] but he transmuted the ethical forms.

The approach to ethics was in the form of an adjustment of the heart to the will of God.[25]

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23. Shailer Mathews, op. cit., p. 82.

24. By this statement I mean that he actually understood the kingdom eschatologically, not that he used that category only because it was familiar to his listeners and he could thereby speak in terms that they could understand, as some have argued in the past.

25. Bosworth, op. cit., p. 151.

So we see in Matt. 5:21-48 that it is the motive and the intention that determine the outcome of the act. In facing each situation the righteous man will surrender his will to God. And if his heart is in accord with God's will, his actions will be acceptable. (Matt. 5:34-35). Now perhaps we can understand why the first recorded statement of Jesus is given its prominent position:

> The time has come and the reign of God is near; repent, and believe the good news. MK 1:15

Jesus' primary interest is not in the nature of the coming, but in the need for repentance on the part of those who would be ready to enter the kingdom when it does come. The bringing in of the kingdom is left to God; even Jesus himself does not know the time of its coming. The vital concern of man must be the ethical preparation. As we noted above, Jesus transformed current apocalyptic conceptions when he refused to point to signs of the kingdom and made sincere repentance rather than Hebraic ancestry the prerequisite for entrance.

The cry of Jesus, "The time has come and the reign of God is near" is a challenge to men to submit to the absolute will of God.

> The one concern in this teaching was that man should conceive his immediate concrete situation as the decision to which he is constrained, and should

> decide in this moment for God and surrender his natural will. Just this is what we found to be the final significance of the eschatological message, that man now stands under the necessity of decision, that his 'Now' is always for him the last hour, in which his decision against the world and for God is demanded, in which every claim of his own is to be silenced. [26]

The only real future for man is that which he will live in fellowship with God attained through decision. The sublime ethic of Jesus is not an interim ethic; it is the basis of life in the kingdom. Every other aspect of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom was subordinate to this one central, compelling idea.

> While therefore the Gospels contain sayings which indicate that Jesus expected the consummation of God's plan in a short time, this chronological aspect of his thought was a minor feature, and it had positive worth as a vivid pictorial presentation of God's absolute claim and certain triumph. [27]

There remains in this picture a tension, which many have attempted to relieve by softening Jesus' absolute moral demands, - "the tension arising inevitably out of a recognition, on the one hand, of our moral weakness and wrongness, and, on the other, out of a vision

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26. Bultmann, op. cit., p. 306.

27. Filson, op. cit., p. 101.

of God's perfect will."[28] For Jesus the will of God was absolute and unbending; the solution of the tension lay in the fact of God's love. He is the demanding God, but he is also the seeking God. Like the shepherd looking for the one lost sheep, like the father awaiting the return of his prodigal son, God yearns for the turning of the penitent sinner.

> Our salvation lies not in the perfection of our obedience, but in the completeness of our submission and in the sincerity of our repentance - or better, it lies not in ourselves at all, but in God's infinite compassion, which only our pride and complacency can obstruct.[29]

As Martin Dibelius points out, even the maxims of the Sermon on the Mount are to be understood in relation to this new age which is now beginning for those who will turn to God. "To the followers of Jesus, he was - in his teaching, in his deeds - the personal embodiment of the coming kingdom."[30] He did not inaugurate the new world of God, but he was the assurance from God that it existed and was rapidly approaching. And whenever men responded to his call and committed their lives to God, they experienced the spiritual power of

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28. John Knox, op. cit., p. 43.

29. Ibid. p. 44.

30. Martin Bibelius, "The Sermon on the Mount and Christ's Mission," in Contemporary Thinking About Jesus, p. 269.

the kingdom even in this present age.

The concept of the kingdom is important not alone for what it tells us of the content of Jesus' preaching, but also for its implications in regard to his thought of himself and his consciousness of a special mission. His conviction that the kingdom was in some way already present as a result of his work is vital to our understanding of his concept of mission.

> When he declared that through his ministry the Kingdom was in the act of dawning, he indicated that his role was unique, his relation to God unparalleled. The Jewish pattern of thought which could most naturally convey this idea was the Messianic concept. 31.

Both logically and chronologically a study of Jesus' own messianic ideas must begin with his temptations. Coming from his baptismal experience, whatever that may have been, with a strong sense of divine commission, he faced various avenues of possible expression of his mission.[32] His decision as to the nature of that mission and the means by which he would carry it out was a crisis comparable in significance only with

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31. Filson, op. cit., p. 145.

32. Parsons, op. cit., p. 54.

the experience in Gethsemane.

From his Jewish heritage Jesus would of course be familiar with the nature of the messianic expectations of his people, of which there were two main divisions, the political and the transcendental.[33] Those who looked for a political Messiah expected him to free Israel from oppression and reestablish her political glory; in the contemporary situation his primary task was to be the overthrow of Roman rule. The heavenly Messiah would come with the power of God's angels and subdue the oppressors, establishing the chosen glory, perhaps with a great judicial assize. But the course of the temptation story follows the same pattern as Jesus' transformation of these ideas in his teaching on the kingdom.

It is certain that the outcome of the temptation experience was the abandonment by Jesus of these hopes, a break with the traditional messianic interpretations of his people. In the first two temptations he recognizes the need for obedience and trust toward God; it is in his reaction to the third that he definitely makes his decision, that he commits himself to a mission which

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33. Ibid., p. 46

is to meet men on a spiritual level, in terms of a prophetic messiahship.[34] He will not pander to the political ambitions of his people; he will declare the necessity of the salvation of their souls.

> Certain avenues of national leadership which might well attract an ardent Jewish religionist possessed by a compelling sense of mission have been considered and definitely renounced. He appears publicly as an announcer that the kingdom is imminent and that repentance is the indispensable condition of participating in its happiness and advantages.[35]

The temptation story and the nature of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom are concurrent evidence that he conceived of his mission as one that would meet his people on a spiritual and ethical level. If the narratives of the temptations are questioned, we can at least say that they referred to some kind of an inner struggle which resulted in decision, for they " . . agree with the general witness of the Synoptics that Jesus put aside considerations of personal prestige and dreams of the nationalistic and militaristic triumph of his people."[36]

Jesus' own messianic consciousness was characteristically expressed in his sense of a filial relationship

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34. Bowman, John Wick, The Intention of Jesus, pp. 166-167

35. Parsons, op cit., p. 45.

36. Filson, op. cit., p. 146.

to God. This belief was formative of his personality, which in turn determined his vocation. It involved an intimate knowledge of the Father by the Son and the commitment of the power of revelation to the Son.[37]

> All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: And no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal himself. Matt. 11:27
> cf Luke 10:22

Though this passage has been rejected by many because of its Johannine character, Filson objects that such a stand " . . begs the question by assuming that the Christological development in the Fourth Gospel had no basis in genuine historical tradition about Jesus." And he concludes that, "There is no reason to doubt that the section stood in Q." [38] The messianic consciousness grew out of this belief in sonship. That sonship was to be the means of mediating the power of God, which would be manifested in men's salvation, i.e. in their preparation for the kingdom.[39]

The distinguishing mark of Jesus' sense of sonship was its essential moral quality. It was on a level which

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37. Bowman, op. cit., p. 176

38. Filson, op. cit., p. 148.

39. Cave, The Doctrine of the Person of Christ, p. 21.

the Jewish writers had approached in their thought of the nation as God's son. Jesus took over the idea and emphasised the need for the individual to return to his Father, and found the explanation of his own vocation in a peculiarly close relationship to that same Father. But his conception of sonship did not contain the metaphysical content found in it by later Hellenistic Christianity. His sonship was the result of moral union and absolute obedience. "The Sonship of our Lord arises out of His direct, intimate knowledge of God; it is not that his knowledge of God rises out of His 'metaphysical Sonship.'"[40]

The apocalyptic vehicle most commonly used in the Synoptics to describe the mission of Jesus was the term, "Son of Man." As used in the Similitudes of Enoch, this term was personalised and individualised. It refers there to the "celestial human being" who has always been with God and will one day be revealed to the world,[41] when in his wisdom he fulfills his ultimate function of bringing about the punishment of the wicked and the exaltation of the righteous.[42]. The our-

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40. C.J. Wright, Modern Issues in Religious Thought, p. 179; Quoted in Angus, op. cit., p. 150.

41. Burkitt in Mackintosh, The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ, p. 21.

42. Parsons, op. cit., p. 5.

den of evidence and of opinion points to the fact that the term was in use in pre-Christian times and that it already carried messianic implications.[43] But it also has an element of humility about it that is not carried by the other messianic titles.

In the Synoptics, the term Son of Man is recorded as spoken by Jesus about seventy times, and these references can be divided between those that refer "(a) to Jesus' earthly work, especially as it culminates in suffering and death, or (b) to the final glory of his parousia."[44] And all of the early sources carry at least the latter usage.

> There is therefore no early standard of Synoptic tradition which did not look upon Jesus as the heavenly Son of Man; or, at least, that belief has affected all strata of the Gospel tradition.[45]

There has been much discussion of the question of whether Jesus actually used the term Son of Man himself. It has been suggested that he did not use it and that the disciples applied it to him at a later date, or that he used it to refer to another agent of God who would appear at a later time.

The second alternative conflicts with several points of the Synoptic evidence: Jesus' identification of John

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43. G.F. Moore, R. Otto, Dalman, Goguel, & T.W. Manson concur; Bowman, op. cit., p. 125.

44. Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 21.

45. Booth, New Testament Studies, p. 108.

the Baptist with Elijah, which logically made him the last of God's earthly agents; his awareness of present manifestations of the kingdom which were a result of his own power; and the fact that some of the passages refer to his present suffering rather than to the final triumph of the Son of Man. (Matt. 8:20, Luke 9:58, Mark 8:31).[46]

As to the other alternative - that Jesus never used the phrase - Grant holds that the disciples were attracted by the uniqueness of Jesus and therefore applied the phrase to him. Weiss claims that the resurrection appearances were the reward of faith which had endured even through the experience of the Crucifixion, and it was these appearances which convinced the disciples that the term was appropriate. Bowman holds that the disciples were able to accept the fact of the resurrection only because their faith had already been rewarded, and that reward was the declaration of the Son of Manship to the inner circle.[47] The last position would appear to be the most tenable. I would agree with Craig who says that the crucifixion of Jesus on a Messianic charge, the constant interpretation of the term Son of Man by the evangelists in terms of its

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46. Filson, op. cit., pp. 149-150.

47. Bowman, op. cit., p. 129.

meaning in Enoch, and the fact that there were no Christian communities which did not accept Jesus as the Christ, all point to "the conclusion that Jesus did believe that his own life was in some way identified with the coming Son of Man."[48]

This title would enable Jesus to keep free of the militaristic and nationalistic hope expressed by such terms as the Son of David.

> The Son of Man pattern expressed the transcendent and divinely given nature of the Kingdom, yet had a background in Judaism fitted to express the limitations and privations of Jesus' earthly life and ministry. It carried a content of unique function and relation to God.[49]

But even though we conclude that Jesus did use messianic titles which were part of his Jewish heritage, it is evident that he altered them considerably. He did not seek the power of a political saviour or the glory of a heavenly being; rather he took the line of the prophets and challenged men to turn to God and to live by the law of love. But this transformation of messianic terms was inevitable, for

> . . . his conviction of the spiritual essence of the Kingdom would also reflect itself in His idea of His own Person and work. The nature of the Christ or of the Son of Man must be related to the nature of the Kingdom He heralds or establishes. 50.

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48. Craig in Booth, op. cit., pp. 113-114.

49. Filson, op. cit., p. 150.

50. Oliver Chase Quick, Liberalism, Modernism and Tradition, p. 82.

It is in this transformation of messianic titles that we find the most significant originality in Jesus' thought. It was in the light of his fundamental filial consciousness that he built his own concept of true messiahship. "Jesus put into the word 'Messiah' meaning of an ethical and spiritual nature which it had not had."[51] To the concept of exaltation and triumph which already attached to the term Son of Man, he brought the note of humiliation, suffering, and death; he replaced the concept of a power which would defeat evil by force, with the idea of a love which by the endurance of the utmost suffering would reconcile the world to God. It was in the figure of the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah that he found the most accurate description of his own mission. Here was the most unique concept of Jesus:

> To the Jew, the terms 'Son of Man' and 'Messiah' stood for exaltation and glory, for the authority of God exercised by his viceroy . . . until and except for Jesus, no one ever thought of bringing together the three epithets that lay side by side in Hebrew prophecy and apocalyptic, 'Son of Man', 'Messiah,' and 'Suffering Servant'. This was utterly new with Jesus.[52]

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51. Hillyer H. Straton, "What Jesus Thought About Himself," in Christendom, Vol. X, No. 2, p. 226.

52. Bowman, op. cit., p. 143.

The words associated with the baptismal experience point to Jesus' awareness that his was a twofold commission, that of the Messiah and also of the Suffering Servant.[53] And if that experience is placed too early in the record, it only means that this realisation came to him only as his ministry progressed and his insights deepened. The claim to Messiahship required some kind of authority. Others had looked for it in the political or apocalyptic sphere; Jesus found it in the conviction that love was the most powerful force in a moral universe, and he expressed in the figure of the Suffering Servant.[54]

This position is further vindicated by the experience of Palm Sunday which was no triumph at all, but rather a studied attempt to fulfill the Zechariahan prophecy of the humble Messiah, though that prophecy does not mention the Suffering Servant concept and may be considered as a short in the development of Hebrew ideas on the subject, having no influence on subsequent thinking. Palm Sunday is the culmination of the process by which Jesus separated the idea of suffering from the

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53. H. Wheeler Robinson, The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit, p. 112.

54. Bowman, op. cit., p. 145.

Suffering Servant concept and attached it to another, the Messiah. That process of thought, as described by Bowman, was: (1) He was the Messiah who was to rule by love, (2) He must suffer for those he loved, (3) He was the Son of Man and would ultimately be exalted.[55] Similar is the conclusion reached by Mackintosh who says that Jesus used the term of his own representative humanity pointing ahead to a future transcendent glory, in the spirit of the usage in the Similitudes, but emphasising more and more the element of suffering.[56] In the phraseology of Muirhead,

> The 'Son of Man' in the mature mind of Jesus is the person who unites a career of utmost service and suffering with a sure prospect of transcendent glory. And herein we touch at once the height and depth of his originality.[57]

And this is the central truth which seems to struggle for expression in the pages of the New Testament. In Acts Christ is the ascended Messiah, but he has received that exalted position only as a reward after living a life of humility. Paul tells of the Divine Being, who surrendering all the attributes of divinity, is content to live and suffer as a man. The Christ of Hebrews is the

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55. Ibid., p. 149.

56. Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 23.

57. Muirhead, Eschatology of Jesus, in Ibid., p. 24.

glorious high priest, but he is also himself the sacrifice. The Apocalypse presents a combination of glory and humility in the figure of the Lamb. In the Fourth Gospel the very fact of incarnation constitutes condescension and humility on the part of God. Each writer sought to express in words the distinctive element which caused men to receive him as the Messiah. But that element, because of its newness, they found difficult of expression. Perhaps none did better than Paul in his letter to the Philippians:

> Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient, even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Phil. 2:5-11.

Beyond the evidence from the records of Jesus' own life and teachings, we have the witness of the enduring community, united solely by its regard for this person.

> If then . . . we place ourselves back in the original group of Christians, one fact is outstanding: they were all expecting Jesus to fulfill their expectations of a messianic salvation. They had very little else in common except what they had inherited from their Jewish ancestry.[58]

But their conviction with respect to this one point of agreement was bolstered by their acceptance of the resurrection as an accomplished fact. There had come to them the conviction that their leader was no longer imprisoned by the grave, that he had been raised from the dead. "God, by that act, had made him indubitably the Christ, the Messiah. Their Master had ascended up into Heaven and from him had come the Holy Spirit, whose power and wonder they daily experienced."[59]

And the empiricist cannot lightly dismiss the evidence of the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit for the unique presence of God in Christ. The voice of history cannot be denied. The transformation of the disciples from a frightened, cringing band into a group of fearless, dynamic men requires a tremendous explanation. Similarly, the infusion of power into the Church at Pentecost and the resultant conquest of the civilized world bespeak a more than human power. We cannot

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58. Shailer Mathews, The Faith of Modernism, p. 127.

59. Sydney Cave, The Doctrine of the Person of Christ, p. 32.

arrive at an empirical explanation of the exact nature of these events, but we can say on the basis of the empirical evidence that they require more than a psychological explanation.

> To affirm a resurrection of Christ's physical body from the tomb is in the line of least resistance for the orthodox. To deny the event entirely and affirm the resurrection only as a symbol of a general principle is in the line of least resistance for the religious liberal. I believe that we may remain in closer touch with the realities if we do neither, but rather affirm that all we know of the event is that the visions of Christ after his death were the means by which the disciples became assured of what was essentially true, the continuing presence of God as the living Christ and as the Spirit in the work that Jesus had begun.[60]

The only alternative to accepting the testimony of the disciples to the continued existence and presence of the Jesus they had known is " . . . to suppose that Christianity is a delusion based upon an illusion."[61]

To sum up our findings: we can say that Jesus was aware of a unique, God-given vocation, which he conceived in moral and spiritual categories through the transformation of the thought forms of his own age, and that its fulfillment would involve both suffering and glorification; that others were also aware of his vocation and gradually

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60. John C. Bennett, Christian Realism, p. 120.

61. H. Wheeler Robinson, op. cit., p. 112.

realised its nature; and that the conversion and persistence of a community dedicated to him testifies to the validity of that vocation.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORIGINAL EXPERIENCE (Concluded)

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Actually in our dealing with the records of the original experience, the Synoptic Gospels, we have a twofold task. First comes that which we attempted to do in the last chapter - form an estimate of Jesus' own conception of his person and mission. The other half of our task is to discover whether the life and character portrayed in those records are in accord with that conception. In following this plan we are being faithful both to our method and also to historic Christianity. For the experience of the disciples was not only that of hearing a teacher; it included also a daily contact with a man, and the words of the man can have meaning for human life only if he fulfilled them in his own life, only if they are supported by utter sincerity. And the conviction of the Church has been that they were. "Historic Christianity rests back ultimately not upon a teaching but upon a person, but teaching and person belong together and neither can be understood or even examined without the other."[1]

We now turn to the second half of our task.

The mere fact that there is interest in Christology

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1. John Knox, The Man Christ Jesus, p. 45.

nineteen hundred years after this person passed from the earthly scene is evidence that there was an amazingly unique quality in his character. Men cannot look upon Jesus without sensing a numinous quality about him.

> The picture of Jesus with a light shining about his head is not absurd because Jesus causes that type of response. We cannot read the gospels without feeling that here is a man worthy of respect, reverence, and worship. There is a uniqueness about Jesus' humility which marks him off from other men.[2]

Older Christologies attempted to express this quality by saying that Jesus was sinless. But there is a double weakness to this description. In the first place, it is obvious that the fact that Jesus never committed a sin is beyond the possibility of empirical demonstration. It is true that no act of sin is recorded in the records; however, in view of the attitude of the writers toward Jesus, we could hardly expect them to record such an act even if it occurred. Empirically, all that we can say with regard to Jesus' sinlessness is that any act of sin would be highly inconsistent with the character portrayed in the records.

But there is an even more serious weakness in the traditional description of Jesus as one who was without sin, namely, that it is at best a negative concept.

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2. R.C. Miller, What We Can Believe, pp. 90-91.

> The word 'sinlessness' suggests the idea, which has been the bane of popular ethics, that the highest moral achievement is 'to do no harm'; whereas the most conspicuous teaching of Christ is His insistence that righteousness is positive and consists not in avoidance of error, but in being inspired by an overwhelming passion for good, and by an unquenchable love of God and man. [3]

Jesus was constantly setting aside the conventional mores of society and seeking the meaning of man's action, not in its adherence to a set of rules, but in its relation to God, the source of goodness. [4] The principal end of moral action was not the achievement of a phraisaic sinlessness, but the achievement of union with the purposes of God. Thus men were told to forgive their enemies, "That ye may be sons of your Father". They would be sons of their Father, not because they avoided the wrong, but because they had a passion for the right.

Empirical method and Synoptic evidence both lead us to the conclusion that Jesus' moral perfection was not the result of an inability to sin, but rather the fruit of a unified life purpose. The clue to our own moral weakness is found in the cry of Paul, "The good that I would, that I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do."

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3. Burnett Hillman Streeter, Reality, p. 190.

4. A.T. Cadoux, "Christ in the New Testament", in Andrews, The Lord of Life, p. 65.

It comes from our inability to harmonize the instinctive desires toward right and toward wrong, toward goodness and toward evil, which are part of our very natures. And it is in his solution of this conflict, rather than in a metaphysical immunity from sin, that we discover the moral grandeur of Jesus. The evidence of the record indicates that this solution was reached only through a moral crisis. We read in the Gospel of Luke that "Jesus grew in wisdom," and even a later writer recognizes the fact that he was "made perfect through suffering." It is in the Temptation Story that we find evidence of an intense moral struggle. As was pointed out in the last chapter, the result of this experience was Jesus' recognition of the primary of God's will for his life. But we cannot assume that this experience was the end of temptation for him. The story concludes with the statement that "The Devil departed from him for a season." And Jesus refers to his disciples as those "that have continued with me in my temptations." We can only conclude that in one whose purpose was so high, and whose task was so overwhelming, the temptation to subvert that purpose or to give up in the face of that task would be uniquely acute. And the fact that he persevered to the end testifies to a positive and creative righteousness unequalled in human history.

> It is not on account of a negative sinlessness which, even if actual, is unprovable, but because of the positive quality in his life and words, and because in history Christ has been uniquely creative, that no discussion of the nature either of goodness or of God can afford to leave him out.[5]

Perhaps a result of that moral achievement, which came from his closeness to God and was certainly guided by it, was Jesus' accurate insights in dealing with men and with situations. Whether he is dealing with individual men and evaluating their characters, e.g., his relations with his disciples, with Zaccheus, with the Syrophenician woman, or whether he speaks in regard to social and religious problems in general, he displays an insight which carries him at once to the fundamental issues involved.

It was this insight which enabled him, as we discovered in the last chapter, to choose the most vital and religiously meaningful categories of his time for the expression of his own mission, and to transform those categories, grounding them more firmly in reality. Here was a mind which could discern the exact nature of the problem he faced, could distinguish between the vital and the unimportant issues involved, and could reach a solution which was founded upon a basic principle. Divorced from his primary Godliness, and his consequent love for the

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5. Streeter, op. cit., p. 193.

children of God, this ability could have been a skill to be used for undesirable and selfish ends. But because it was linked with his moral integrity, love was the motivating power back of his dealing with every person and every situation; both a love for persons and also a love of righteousness which caused him to seek for every person he met the highest development of his character. Thus he lays down a program of reform for Zaccheus, he challenges the rich young ruler, he forgives the woman taken in adultery, adding the injunction that she sin no more, and he boldly rebukes the hypocrites and the unjust.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." Taking this statement of Paul at its face value, without for the moment considering the metaphysical implications, we can find abundant evidence for its truth in Jesus' sense of values. First in importance was the fact that men were the children of God and must be led into a closer relationship with him. Jesus came into conflict with the political and religious authorities of his day because he judged them both in terms of their contribution to that primary end.

The numerous conflicts of Jesus with the Jewish authorities over the keeping of the sabbath gives us the clue to his estimate of the regulations involved in religion. Their authority was contingent upon their

regard for the worth of man as a child of God. "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath." If the sabbath fulfilled its true function, that of enriching man's life and bringing him closer to God, it was to be kept. If it failed to do this, then a man could break it without violating the will of God. "According to Jesus" principle, God is not interested in any kind of sabbath observance, or any other religious practice, except in so far as it contributes something to the richness and fullness of man's life."[6] Montefiore points to this attitude of Jesus toward the ceremonial law as an example of his originality, saying that "The conception of the Law, and of Scripture, to which the attitude of Jesus points forward, was not theoretically reached till modern times."[7]

Just as Jesus refused to allow the ceremonial law to stand as an obstacle to his extending to men the help that they needed, so he set aside also the distinctions of race and class which marked his society.

It is probable that in his early life Jesus was by no means poverty-stricken. It was only because of the way in which he chose to spend that life that he had "not where to lay his head." Rather it was by choice that he

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6. W.A. Smart, The Contemporary Christ, pp. 66-67.

7. Claude G. Montefiore, "The originality of Jesus", in Keppler, Contemporary Thinking About Jesus, p. 330.

extended his love to the poor and the outcast. Such an attitude is to be expected in view of his profound sense of the Fatherhood of God and the worth of all men. He was concerned for their potentiality rather than for their actuality, for the destiny they might yet know, rather than for the misfortune which was their present lot. When a sinful woman followed him, "Others might know 'what manner of woman' it was that touched Him: He saw the strange greatness of her love, and knew what manner of woman she might become."[8] He was "moved with compassion" at the sight of so many of the children of God condemned to the lower strata of society and thereby denied even the aid of religion. They could not hope to keep the intracacies of the law which they could not even understand, and so they had no hope of salvation. But the keen insight of Jesus carried him beyond this artificial sanctification of human beings; he saw that even the lowliest had a potential life with God, and he strove to help them realise that fact.

Likewise in his attitude toward foreigners, Jesus placed first things first. His fellow Jews must have been amazed to see him find the greatest exhibition of

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8. Cadoux, op. cit., p. 69.

faith in a gentile, or to hear him tell a story which made a despised Samaritan an example to be followed in the way of brotherly love.

And this moral insight which Jesus exhibited in his dealings with men characterizes his teaching as well. He also goes directly to the fundamental concerns of life. From the whole of his Jewish background he chose just two sentences to stand as a summary of the religion and ethics of man:

> Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and with all thy strength. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Here is a standard which is at once both final and dynamic. If we believe in a God of love who wills the well-being of mankind, then it can never be replaced or surpassed. It is indeed final. But for its full realisation, it demands a dynamically righteous society striving to attain it. "As definition it cannot be improved upon; and the ideal which is defined is one towards which the higher minds in all countries and in all ages have been slowly and painfully feeling their way."[9]

But the supreme contribution of Jesus lay, not in enunciating a moral ideal, but in pointing the way to its achievement. Montefiore finds another evidence of Jesus'

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9. Streeter, op. cit., p. 207.

originality in his following of the pattern set forth by the prophet Ezekiel:

> I will seek that which is lost; I will bring again that which is driven away; I will bind up that which is broken; I will strengthen that which is sick.

> It was left for Jesus to turn this picture of divine activity into an ideal of human activity, . . . With this teaching of service may also be associated . . . the doctrine of the hard life, and of deliberate self-sacrifice. 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.' [10]

In the last chapter we said that in his conception of himself, Jesus united the idea of the Son of Man with that of the Suffering Servant and concluded that only through service and suffering could true greatness - true in the eyes of God - be attained. This was not just an idea which he propounded; it was the basis of the life which he lived. He exhibited this way in his constant service to men, in his bravery in the face of of opposition, in his devotion to his followers, but above all in his death. If we impute to Jesus a supernatural foreknowledge of the resurrection which should follow his death, his sacrifice is robbed of its moral grandeur. But the evidence of the records, coupled with the utter distress of his followers at his death, indicate

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10. Montefiore, op. cit., p. 381.

that he had no such prevision. His willingness to face his enemies and risk defeat grew out of the faith that his cause was God's and that his destiny lay with God.

> But to him, as to other men, this was a matter, not of knowledge but of faith. . . . He braved a death of utter failure, torture and disgrace in the hope (not with the explicit knowledge) at that price to realise on earth an unsurpassable ideal. 11

Here is the validation of his sense of vocation. He was not content with theorising about messiahship, nor even with claiming it or seeking its rewards; he was willing to pay the price which insight into God's moral universe told him that it would cost.

> Everything about him was of one piece- the set of values by which one ought to live, the life of simplicity and love in which he manifested them and so lifted every soul he touched, the consummation of that life in suffering love upon a cross. 12

His union of life and ideal, his unselfish and devoted use of the insights gained through his religious genius, is the supreme quality of the Gospel picture of Jesus. He is indeed as Montefiore puts it, "The hero, humble and

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11. Streeter, op. cit., p. 189.

12. Georgia Harkness, "Jesus is Lord" in Contemporary Thinking About Jesus, p. 352.

self-sacrificing, tender and severe, with a convinced consciousness of inspiration and of mission, the servant and helper of his brethern, but always the leader and the Lord."[13]

And all these achievements of the man Jesus were indeed the achievements of a man. " . . . whatever else we may say about Jesus, the fact of his true and full humanity is fundamental. He had all the characteristics of a real man."[14] A psychological study of the records discloses no docetic picture of an unreal humanity. We see him accused of being a winebibber and a gluttonous man; we read that he weeps, that he is tempted to sin, that he engages in spirited discussions with his opponents, and finally that he suffers and dies.[15] Traditional Christology, while formally admitting the fact of Jesus' humanity, in practice has disregarded it. We can say at the outset that the achievements which we have found in Jesus' character were wrought by the instrument of humanity and redound to its glorification. The empiricist finds no second nature imposed upon his human nature and overriding it in the critical moments of his

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13. Montefiore, op. cit., p. 386.

14. D. Maill Edwards, "A Christology in Modern Terms", in The Lord of Life, pp. 208-9.

15. J.S. Whale, Christian Doctrine, p. 100.

life. He was possessed of real humanity which asserted itself through personalindividuality. A doctrine of impersonal humanity has no place in empirical thought; we cannot experience humanity in the abstract. We put meaning into the term through our contact with individual human beings, each displaying idiosyncrasies - physical, psychological, and spiritual - which add to our total conception of humanity.

But while Jesus' humanity was real and personal, at the same time it was in a sense universal. Norman Pittinger is by no means an empiricist, but he does establish this fact on an empirical basis. He writes:

> But in the sense that Jesus Christ's humanity was representative of all humanity, not by any arbitrary choice on our part after the fact, but by the depth of the solidarity of the human race with its interconnectedness and interrelatedness, our Lord was assuming not only this specific individuation of human nature, but human nature itself. He was truly human because he was truly this human being; and by being truly this human being he was truly human. He was both man and a man. 16

By meeting in a particular human life the deepest moral crises of the human race, he shared in all human life, and this fact gives universal significance and validity to the values incarnate in his life. On this point hinges both the reality and the importance of the life of

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16. W. Norman Pittinger, Christ and Christian Faith, p. 31.

Jesus for the man of the twentieth century.

In the character of this human being we see developed to the highest degree those qualities which we recognize as the standards by which any man's character is to be judged. The combination of love and righteousness, of grace and judgment, which are found at the heart of his life and teachings, are thus seen on the basis of the empirical evidence to be of the very nature of reality; or to express the same fact in theological terms, they are indications of the character of God himself. The evidence of history testifies to the validity of this assertion. Jesus' ideals have not been outmoded by the advance of the generations which have followed him. The movements which we look upon today as being the embodiment of our highest ideals are those which can find their foundations in the ideals of love and justice which he taught and on the basis of which he lived. The full realisation ofpersonality through service - of losing one's life to save it - has been established as an ethical axiom by the teaching of history.[17]

At this point we can say that Jesus was the incarnation of the highest thought that men have yet evolved concerning God. Without yet considering the realm of the

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17. Mary Ely Lyman, Jesus, p. 50.

metaphysical, we can conclude from the empirically discovered facts, that Jesus possessed unique insight into the character of God which enabled him to live a life and teach a way of life that revealed more of the nature of God than men had yet been able to discover.

> Jesus is man's revelation of God because through his life and teaching men have come and do come into knowledge of the reality of God and of his attributes. In a very real sense Jesus' conception of God is the culmination of progressive revelation.[18]

This fact in no way detracts from his greatness. Rather it makes his position more secure by anchoring him firmly to history. The fact that much of his teaching was not original makes his genius in the field of religion more vivid. He saw relationships, he understood principles, which were beyond the intellectual and moral capacities of other men.[19]

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18. Miller, op. cit., p. 92.

19. C.C. McCown, "Jesus and the Problem of History", in Contemporary Thinking About Jesus, p. 183.

CHAPTER V

INCARNATION

Before we can express the results of our investigation of the original experience in terms of metaphysical categories, we must define more closely two words which we have used thus far with only a minimum of definition, namely, value and revelation.

We have said that by revelation the perceiving mind discovers God at work in the natural processes of the world, as those processes enter into his own experience. A scientific attitude toward revelation makes it obvious that God is at work in the whole realm of experience. Our task now is to discover the pattern by which the processes which we observe in the world are developing, and the goals toward which it points.

> No philosophy of science which does not give central importance to nature as a creative process and to the facts of life and consciousness as the climax of that process can be accepted as adequate. The interpretation of naive experience and of the physical sciences requires to be completed by a philosophy of evolution. [1]

Evolutionary philosophy is now characterized by the concept of emergence, as developed by such writers as Dr. Whitehead,

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1. Henry Pitney Van Dusen, The Plain Man Seeks For God, p. 94.

Professor C. Lloyd Morgan, and Professor S. Alexander. Professor Morgan describes the process of evolution as a "steplike advance with the sudden appearance of new characters."[2] There is a sharp distinction between this understanding of the evolutionary process and that earlier teaching which conceived of an automatic process by which nature rolled to perfection without any divisions between the stages of development. Now it is seen that something distinctly new appears at each stage. "The reality of each higher step possesses distinctive and definable characteristics which clearly mark it off from those lower in the scale, characteristics never seen before."[3] There is a continuity of development in our world, but at the same time there is also the emergence of new features as that development continues. An adequate philosophy must take into account both of these elements. The lower stages contain the potentiality, or the 'stuff' of the next higher stage, but cannot produce that next stage. Thus the resultant picture is something like that envisioned by the late Archbishop Temple:

> The structure of reality, as it presents itself to us, seems to be as follows; it consists of many grades, of which each

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2. Evolution in the Light of Modern Knowledge, essay on "Biology", p. 114; Quoted in Roberts, The Christian God, p. 81.

3. Van Dusen, op. cit., p. 95.

> presupposes those lower than itself, and of which each finds its own completeness or perfect development only in so far as it is indwelt or possessed by that which is above it.[4]

But whence come these new stages of reality? What is the source of the new emergents? Scientists discover that there is throughout the whole process, a nisus, a driving power which controls and directs the process. For Lloyd Morgan, it is God. "God is the nisus directive of the course of events."[5] But Professor Whitehead goes further and implies that God is transcendent and beyond the process. It is here that we find the clue in modern thought to a new understanding of the concepts of the immanence and the transcendence of God, which belong to the Hebrew-Christian tradition. God is transcendent in that he supplies the general structure within which the process, directing it toward the realisation of his final goals. He is at once the source of the goals and the strength by which they are realised. Archbishop Temple listed the grades of reality as matter, life, mind and spirit. Writers in the field of emergent evolution vary in the number of stages which they find in the total picture, but they agree on the final stage, spirit. Writers in the field of emergent evolution vary in the number of stages which they find in the total picture, but they

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4. William Temple, Christ the Truth, p. 4.

5. Lloyd Morgan, Emergent Evolution, p. 34, quoted in Roberts, op. cit., p. 82.

agree on the final stage, spirit. And this spirit is to be defined as "the capacity of persons to recognize, to appreciate, and to give themselves in service to values."[6] Since each stage presupposes and uses those lower than itself, for the realisation of a purpose which is completely beyond the lower, it is only natural that we should seek the explanation of reality, not in the lower stages, but in the highest of all, this level of spirit. It is for this reason that our investigation of Christology has been concerned with the discovery of value, that category which is peculiar to the realm of spirit.

> In the experiences of value which stand as the culmination of nature's striving and in the goal to which it points . . . Surely it is here - in its highest emergent factors - that we shall most clearly discern the purpose and most nearly touch the Purposer behind it all. For the goal represents God's hope for his world.[7]

Religion is always concerned with the values experienced in this realm of spirit; it is peculiarly the field of religion. Others disciplines are concerned with the various values such as the aesthetic and the ethical, but religion has a synthetic interest in all these values which seeks to organize them under a supreme value. And as this value is experienced by spirit, it is the value

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6. Van Dusen, op. cit., p. 99.

7. Van Dusen, op. cit., p. 105.

of moral loyalty and goodness; it is not a means to an end but rather an impelling drive in man which carries with it the note of oughtness. This final value is difficult of definition, but our own experience assures us of its objective reality. The ordinary goods of life such as food, wealth, etc. are obviously linked to material foundations, but "None of these things is absolute; I may missthese and yet find the supreme good of life. But if I fail of truth and love and righteousness, then indeed I have failed."[8] The supreme values possess an absolute quality.

> They have a quality which is supra-temporal, that is, eternal; intrinsically they are independent of space and time. We are therefore entitled to regard them as elements or attributes of the unknown-eternal, and to explain their presence in objects and events in timeby supposing that the unknown-eternal projects itself into the here and now.[9]

But this does not represent a supernatural intrusion of God into the natural processes. In the realm of spirit where these values are realised there is a degree of meeting of the immanent and the transcendent. God as the immanent nisus has been directing theprocess toward the realisation of the values which appear only in the

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8. Harris Franklin Rall, Christianity, pp. [illegible].

9. Roberts, op. cit., p. 24.

realm of spirit; the most outstanding and distinctive quality of God is his transcendence, the fact that he is the source of these values; - hence their quality of absoluteness and otherness.

Supreme Values are discovered under a particular situation, namely, human life. Moral righteousness is the goal of the ultimate upreach of human achievement. As a mere idea, it has no reality; it is a real value only when it is incarnate in human life. Goodness as a real entity has no existence apart from personality.

> There is no goodness anywhere except as there is a person who realises it in himself. The notion that there is an abstract reality called goodness . . . which men may, if they will, appropriate, is utterly unphilosophical . . . It may, indeed, exist as an ideal while it is yet unrealized, but its reality is precisely in the degree in which it is made actual in personal achievement. [10]

The value of moral goodness comes into being only as it is realised through the intercourse of spirit with God, who is its source.

There is an underlying significance to the fact that moral righteousness can be discovered only in a person. For this value requires more than appreciation. We said

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10. Edwin Lewis, Jesus Christ and the Human Quest, pp. 87-8.

above that it carries with it an imperative absoluteness. It requires the absolute commitment of the personality. It is not enough that a man have the insight which enables him to discover the moral laws which govern the universe; he can realise the value inherent in them only as he is loyal to them. True knowledge of God comes only as we bring into reality the values which he has set as the goals of creation.

> Religion is first of all a challenge to the will. It offers not so much a theory of the universe as a way of life. It asks men to be loyal to their highest insights. It does not promise truth to men except at the cost of obedience.[11]

Only as man surrenders himself completely - mind and heart and will - to the desires of God does he realise the potentiality of spirit. The aim of all religions exercises must be the achievement of this moral union with the Purposer of creation.

We may say that in the activity of spirit a new quality emerges, effective revelation. The seeking man, in his moral insights, discovers the closeness of God revealing himself.[12] But discovery is here linked with achievement. For, unlike the lower grades of reality, man as spirit can devote himself to the values of God and thereby help to

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11. Ball, op. cit., pp. 199-200.

12. John Baillie, The Place of Jesus Christ in Modern Christianity, p. 106.

achieve them. They come to reality only in personality; and that end cannot be reached by God alone. It requires also the volition of man. The glory of man's position in the scale of creation is that he alone can cooperate with the Creator.

> What is man that thou art mindful of him?
> Thou madest him lower than the angels, to
> crown him with glory and worship.
> Thou makest him to have dominion of the
> works of thy hands, and thou hast put all
> things in subjection under his feet.
> (Psalm 8)

The Psalmist was impressed with the wonder of man's position and sought for the element which was unique in him.

And this unique thing in man, the primarily distinctive element of spirit, is its closeness to God. In the Christian tradition this fact has been expressed by the concept of men as the children of God. It was in the intensity of his own God-consciousness that Jesus found his Gospel that all men are God's children. " . . . in our Lord's teaching God and man meet together in the deepest unity . . . as children (men) are to receive the fullness of the divine life."[13] And they receive the fullness of that life through the mastery of experience, through what we have termed effective revelation. Since it is in the experience of man that the highest values in the scale of being come into existence, he can discover in that ex-

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13. Edward S. Drown, The Creative Christ, p. 57.

perience, not only the immanent power, but the transcendent reality, of God.

> Transcendent reality, that is, is not external to experience but within it, while exceeding it. . . The transcendent, Real, God, exists in Himself and becomes immanent in the consciousness of the experient. Experience thus apprehends ultimate Reality. [14]

But at this point a problem arises. Is man so akin to God as to be himself divine? Or, on the other hand, is God so near to man as to be only human himself? What is the line which divides the two? Do the terms divinity and humanity stand for distinct and separate categories. We must now discover the difference between God and man, the line by which the emergence of value in human life is eternally separate from the end of value which resides in God.

But we are not the first to be confronted with this question. The Greeks and the Hebrews wrestled with the same problem and reached widely divergent conclusions.

In their mythology the Greeks made the difference a quantitative one only. The gods had more wisdom, more power, more goods, than men were ever able to secure. The result of the slimness of this division, with the pos-

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14. John Wright Buckham, The Inner World. p. 97.

sibility that men might secure these things and thus be on equality with the gods, was an intense jealousy on the part of the gods. But in later Greek pantheistic thought this difficulty was solved by making the distinction between God and man a qualitative one of substance. God was pure being, the only reality; man was only becoming and allthe movement involves in his life was actually unreal. Hence a great gulf was fixed between the two which could be bridged only by man's losing his individuality.

> If God is the One and the All, if He is pure Being, if He alone is true reality, and the world of movement is unreal, then man in order to know God must leave the world of time and change. God and man cannot come together unless man ceases to be man and becomes identical with God. [15]

Hebrew thinkers, especially the prophets, were also determined to retain the distinction between God and man. However, they did not resort to the use of the category of substance. They found the clue to God and discovered the real nature of divinity in the fact that God was the source of those attributes in the achievement of which man could realise his destiny. God did not possess attributes which must remain forever foreign to man; he was the source of those attributes which man was only slowly

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15. Drown, op. cit., p. 47.

discovering. The command came to the Hebrews to be holy as their God was holy.

The classical theologians rejected the Hebrew conception of divinity and went to the Greek thinkers for their theological structuve. As a result, they could solve the Christological problem only by inventing an impossible figure who combined within himself the substance of God and the substance of man. As long as men gave serious thought to the formula of Chalcedon, they produced heresies. And the reason is obvious: the Chalcedonian solution was no solution at all. It is the contention of the author that the Hebrews had a far more accurate picture of reality and that Christian theology would have remained in better health if it had been true to its Hebraic heritage. All that we have said of the structure of reality seems to me to indicate that the division between divinity and humanity is not the difference between two entirely different 'substances', but between value incompletely comprehended and partially realized, on the one hand, and the source of value on the other. And the possibility of the two uniting lies, not in a coalesing of "substances," but in a union achieved by a penetrating insight into the moral realities of the universe and an act of will which commits human life to the way indicated by

those realities, by that effective revelation in which both God and man play a part.

To affirm that the division between God and man is one of substance is to confess that divinity is an utterly incomprehensible term to us. But to accept the Hebraic position is to assign meaning to the knowledge of God which we derive from our experience. For the primary attribute which God and man share is a moral one.

> The great truth which there (Hebrew prophecy) finds final recognition is that God is to be looked for in the world nowhere else than in goodness and that goodness is accordingly the only thing He requires of man. The issue at stake is as to what things in our experience most clearly reveal to us the nature of ultimate reality, and as to where we are to look to the more reliable clue to the divine character, the most unmistakable intimation of the divine mind and will. And the spiritual genius of the Hebrew people . . (points) . . . to the highest movements and achievements of the human spirit itself (which are therefore not merely achievements but also endowments) - love and courage and honour and purity and truthfulness. [16]

Isaiah goes to the temple and sees the Lord "high and lifted up"; the seraphim cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy:" God is truly the wholly other, but yet Isaiah enters into fellowship with this divine being through the fulfillment of God's will in his life. In the Hebraic tradition the gulf of

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16. Baillie, op. cit., pp. 111-112.

Greek pantheism is bridged; though the distinction between God and man is secure, there is a continuity of will between them. "The righteousness of God that we find in the Bible receives its content from ideas concerning human relations which negate most human practice but fulfill our highest human aspirations after goodness."[17]

But can we apply the pragmatic test to the concept we have been erecting? Does the experience of the self verify this relationship of God and man? We have said that the supreme values of God are to discovered in the world of facts and persons, in the world of experience, and that their meaning becomes clear to us only asthey are apprehended and appropriated by persons. Then it is within the self that we must look for our evidence.

It is in our own better self that we become aware of a certain degree of union with the purposes of God.

> In some moments of clear vision and final decision, the self becomes a close-knit unity; it is its own central life purpose, behind which all the elements of personality are mobilized in orderly array. Then it is that I say my better self is in command.[18]

Walter Horton points to moments of peculiar personal achievement in the face of difficulties, an unusual strength and integration of the individual, as being indicative of a power greater than the individual which is the source of that strength. Such experiences point to

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17. John Bennett, Christian Realsim, p.29

18. Walter Marshal Horton, Theism and the Modern Mood, p. 106

an immanental divine power, and to a degree at least, to our union with his will. This feeling has its beginning in any shared experience. "The most common basis is the sharing of an emotional experience is being shared."[19] So our highest experiences of all are shared, not only with other human selves, but also with that greater self which we recognize as divine. And we enhance that experience and build greater personalities, as our relations with that power become closer and more constant. This fact is verified in the lives of those who are true to their higher selves. And such lives further define the higher self in terms of altruism. The Godly man has always been the one who subordinated his own interest to the common good. The sense of peace, of obligation, and of sin all stem from the consciousness of this better self and the will to achieve it.[20]

Only as this better self is more clearly defined in experience does the send of value emerge, summing up the human aspirations toward the good, which include moral, esthetic, and religious elements. And at this point the highest reaches of human achievement raise man's eyes to the source and guarantor of the good: man does discover that there is both a continuity and a

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19. Hugh Hartshorne, "An Empirical Approach to a Theory of Character," in Religious Realsim, p.150

20. A. Campbell Garnett, A Realistic Philosophy of Religion, p.244

difference between him and his Creator. The findings of science and the words of religious genius are confirmed in his own experience. Understood in the light of this experience, history is the process of human life through which God is revealed, through which God comes into contact with human life . . and is of supreme religious meaning.[21]

Does this relationship between God and man mean that man steps upon a heavenly escalator which automatically carries him to the realm of moral perfection? It was stated above that it is the glory of man that he is able to cooperate with God in the achievement of value. It is this fact which excludes the concept of inevitable and automatic progress, a concept which is obviously contrary to common human experience. For truly, the most precious gift which God has bestowed upon man is his freedom. We must boldly face the consequences of our position. If it is true that God and man work together to achieve value in this world, then it is also true that that achievement cannot be fully realised without man's consent. Human history is mostly a record of his refusal to give that consent. Potential in man's character is both insight into the reality of God's world and also commitment to his will. But all too often when the insights emerge,

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21. Drown, op. cit., p. 75

they emerge only partially, and commitment does not follow. The creature strives to utilize the insights for the glorification of his own ego; he attemps to win out by subordinating the values of God to the self. It is a case of self for self's sake, rather than of self for the sake of value and ultimately of God. Man's self-consciousness and his ability to survey the whole of creation, as Reinhold Niebuhr points out, have led him into grandoise assumptions about his own nature. He has not used his capacities to glorify his Creator through serving God and man; he has used them for self-glorification and self-assertion. Here is the very nature of sin. It is the block which prevents the appropriate expression of God-given qualities and turns them toward ends which are short of those which the Creator has set up.

Traditionally this failure of man has been traced to the "fall" and "original sin". But " . . any doctrine of the 'fall' of man which makes sin logically inevitable destroys the essential principle of moral responsibility."[22] Some degree of failure on the part of man to embody the values of God is a natural result of his freedom. If he is truly a fellow-worker with God, then the goal can be won only through constant striving. "The truth is that we can never explain the exercise of human freedom without explaining it away. Freedom is a 'first cause.'"[23]

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22. Buckham, op. cit., p. 65

23. Ibid., p. 66.

The reality of this conception of sin is seen when we consider our social as well as our individual failures. In all our efforts to build a better world, to substitute peace for war, to replace the bickerings of capital and labor with an equal distribution of goods, and to solve a multitude of social problems, the potentialities of the solution are present, both in the material world and in the vision of men. "Our selfishness and narrowness, our indifference and inertia, our prejudices and fears have blocked the way."[24] What we need is not a bloody sacrifice to wipe out our sins, or a new city lowered from heaven, but a frank recognition of our sins and their consequences in a moral universe, and a firm determination to commit our lives to the way of moral righteousness which is in accord with that universe.

The requirement of man's salvation then is an effective revelation in terms of the goals which God is striving to realise through the agency of human history, goals which have been clearly defined in that history as moral righteousness and unselfish devotion to others. The fulfillment of God's will means the defeat of that pride which causes man to use his God-given freedom to violate

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24. Ball, op. cit., p. 267

God's moral order and disregard his fellow men. And that fulfillment can be realised only in human life, as the self becomes a "close-knit unity" devoted to "a central life purpose" which coincides with God's "The beleaguered human self needs not only that the Good be a Personal Presence but also an Incarnate Ideal 'wrought out in living characters' in human life."[25]

In this sense Jesus Christ can be acknowledged by all as the first among men, the one in whom " . . is manifest God's purpose for humanity."[26] He is indeed the effective revelation. Others have sought, but achieved only partially, that union of their wills with God's as a result of perfect insight and absolute commitment; he has achieved it to perfection. As pointed out at the conclusion of Chapter IV, it was his adequate understanding of the requirements a moral universe, together with his willingness to pay the price, which led him inevitably to the Cross. And the implications of the Cross found expression in his entire life, which is best described not in the negative term "sinless", but in positive terms of absolute devotion to the will of God. It was that absolute moral union of his will with God's which made the divine present to as great a degree as

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25. Buckham, op. cit., p. 58.

26. Brown, op. cit., p. 113.

possible in a human life.

> Holiness is natural to God as sinfulness is natural to man, and we are surprised by neither. But when we stand in the presence of a Man by whom holiness such as God's was achieved and maintained in conditions that did not guarantee it of themselves, then indeed is the divine revealed. 27.

All of the circumstances were present in his life which lead other men to fall from the high vision of God's purposes. He too was tempted to utilize his insights for self-glorification. But instead he responded to every situation in terms of the values which belong to God's highest order and so revealed to men the fulfillment of life when it remains true to God.

> This was his secret of how to triumph in life, and it was simultaneously his demonstration of God's real nature and of His Mind, His purpose for Humanity. 28

In this revelation, by one act God's will is made known to men, it is fulfilled in the case of one life, and the way to its fulfillment in all men is revealed. A new value has been achieved in human life which was not there before. The Cross stands for a new emergent in the stages of reality, something which goes beyond the levels heretofore known. The person of Jesus, presupposing the whole

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27. Lewis, op. cit., p. 310.

28. John Lewis, "Reality in Religion," in Lord of Life, p. 17.

nature of man, isyet so completely indwelt by God, that he realises a perfection of development. But that perfection is more than the logical outcome of the upward progress of man; it is more than the peak of an emergent evolution. Within this one figure are united the goal and the achieving of the goal. The wall which divides God and man has been broken down.

> So in contemplating Christ, human faith in and loyalty to normal goodness is wrought to such a pitch, that without a break and yet with a distinct sense of difference, it passes over into a reverence which we ought only to pay to God. 29

The distinguishing mark of God is his absolutely righteous will; he is the source of the moral attributes which men possess only in degree. But in the case of the man Jesus we see a will which has that divine quality of absoluteness directing the course of a human life. We conclude them that Christ is unique, not only by being the highest revelation of God, but also in that he was the direct gift of God to men. 30

> We are . . . impelled to believe that in the advent of Jesus of Nazareth, and in His victory over sin, the Divine Father played no passive or permissive part, but actually did something for the enlightenment and salvation of our race. 31.

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29. Ibid., p. 19.

30. Drown, op. cit., p. 123.

31. Baillie, op. cit., pp. 117-118.

It is because men have already found God in the realisation of the values of love and goodness anywhere, that they spontaneously declare that God was in Christ. Because love was made perfect in him, they found the fulness of God in him.[32]

We need not shun the conclusion that God was actually incarnate in Christ on the grounds that it is a law breaking miracle. For it breaks no law yet discovered. As pointed out in the Second Chapter, the primary characteristic of the contemporary scientific outlook is its tentative character. Scientists do not claim to have spoken the last word with regard to the 'laws' which govern the world. They only go forward as they discover more "pointer readings" which are indicative of the mode of operation of our universe. And I submit that the whole experience if moral value, culminating in the Christian experience, is such a pointer reading which must be accepted as evidence on the nature of reality. The question is not: How could such a thing happen in the universe which we have already catalogued? Rather it is: What light does this event cast upon the nature of the universe which we understand only partially? And the conclusion for me is that in this act of divinity and humanity, a new

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32. Ibid., p. 119.

level has been attained in the fulfillment of that moral value which is the final end of God. "As the new creation of God, he is he fulfillment of God's creative purpose which was from the beginning of the world."[33]

> It is God himself, personally present and redeemingly active, who comes to meet men in this man of Nazareth. Jesus is more than a religious genius, such as George Fox, and more than a holy man, such as the lovable lama in Kipling's Kim. He himself knows that he is more. . . The Gospel Story is a tree rooted in the familiar soil of time and sense; but its roots go down into the abyss and its branches fill the heavens; given to us in terms of a country in the Eastern Mediterranean no bigger than Wales during the Roman Principate of Tiberius Caesar in the first century of our era, its range is universal; it is on the scale of eternity. God's presence and His very self were made manifest in the words and works of this man. 34.

Truly, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." The nature of that reconciliation we will consider in the next chapter.

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33. Drown, op. cit., p. 123.

34. J.S. Whale, Christian Doctrine, p. 101.

CHAPTER VI

ATONEMENT

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ATONEMENT

Historically Christology has found its most profound expression in theories of the Atonement. And this emphasis is in keeping with the experience of the Christian community. From the days of Pentecost until now, Christian preachers have been spreading the good new of salvation.

> The early Christians were sure that in the person of Christ God had broken into history to do something for men which they were powerless to do for themselves. Their preaching was not merely repeating the moral maxims of Jesus and urging men to conform to them. It was a call to accept the power which God had released in Christ. [1]

Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in Paul's great pronouncement of faith in the eighth chapter of Romans. He fears nothing, for in Christ God has given him the power to triumph over all the forces of heaven and earth. And it is significant that in the history of Christianity, whenever men have tried to present the ethical message of Jesus without the victory that he won in his life, the result has been an emasculated Gospel, deprived of its power to transform the lives of men.

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1. W.A. Smart, "The Author of Salvation," in Contemporary Thinking About Jesus, p. 401.

Just as the very Gospel itself compels us to state it in terms of Atonement, so our method and the results of our investigation thus far also point toward this final end of the task. At the conclusion of the last chapter, we stated that the Incarnation represents a new level in the achievement of God's moral values, the fulfillment of his creative purpose. This being the case, we must logically ask, what is the significance of that achievement for men? How is human life changed by this act?

In answering these questions, we must fulfill two requirements: we must remain true to our method of empiricism, and our interpretation must be true to the spirit and teachings of Jesus. Theories of the Atonement have often fallen short of the mark because they have started with human ideas of justice and argued by analogy to the justice of God and the requirements of its fulfillment. The weakness of this method has been that the concepts of justice employed have not been true to the highest human experiences of the divine and have often been directly contrary to the teachings of Jesus.

> Subsequent confusion as to the nature of Christianity arose from the literalizing of Scripture, from the superimposition of pagan ideas of sacrifice

> and propitiation, from the permeating influence of the Latin legal institutional mentality, and especially from the Africanism of Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine, through which the legalistic elements of Paulinism secured the right of way over Paul's Christ-mysticism and the ethics of Spirit-guided men. 2

Jesus took his place in the prophetic line of thought, emphasising the sincerely contrite and repentant heart as the only prerequisite to God's forgiveness, and consequently, the legal fiction of theologians is contrary to his teaching.

It is equally true that this approach is contrary to what we learn of God in our own experience. For we learn about God, not in the hard and impersonal ways of legal procedure, but in the stillness of the spirit, and in the acts of love and devotion which reveal that men are approximating the will of God in their lives.

Our thesis has been that the essence of divinity is moral and ethical, and that it finds its expression in terms of will, on the human side in terms of a will which is fully devoted to the highest value of God, moral righteousness. The evidence for Jesus' divinity is found in his insight into the moral reality of the universe and its expression in a will which was identical

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2. S. Angus, Essential Christianity, pp. 80-81.

with God's. And the highest form which that expression took was redeeming love, a love which gives itself fully for the sake of moral righteousness and also for the sake of the loved, to whom he would disclose that value. It is in his expression of this new value - self-giving, suffering, redeeming love, - that we must find the clue to our interpretation of the Atonement. For it is the secret of moral righteousness; it is theonly power which can bring about its fulfillment.

The importance of vicariously suffering love, which reaches its culmination in the Drama of Calvary can be discovered also in our own experience. It is true that all life must struggle for its existence, but it is also true that a living organism can exist only through its dependence upon others. The consequence is not only suffering, but suffering for others. The instinctive nature of this quality on the lower levels of life blinds us to it. But when it becomes conscious and voluntary in the heroic spirit, then we see it in all its splendor. And considered merely as an event in history, the Cross of Christ is the greatest example of spiritual achievement through such vicarious suffering.[3] It con-

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3. H. Wheeler Robinson, Redemption and Revelation, p. 266.

vinces the beholder of " . . . the universal fact that the greatest redeeming power in the world always has been the unmerited, vicarious suffering of pure love." It is the principle which we discover in our daily life, that the innocent suffer for the guilty, and in that suffering do something for the guilty.

It was part of Jesus' mission to set the divine imprimatur upon this supreme achievement of human life. In the Incarnation we discover that such self-sacrificing love is the surest way to fellowship with God. In Jesus' life and death the fact is driven home to us. "It was not an example remote from men's actual life, nor was it an example unrelated to theliving power of God. Rather was it an example set in the very heart of humanity yet vibrant with the very life of God himself."[5] Jesus was declaring to men that such love was of God and that it should belong to men who would know him. His victory on the Cross grew out of his "faith that God is love and that the expression of love is self-sacrifice."[6] But we must be careful to avoid an error at this point. On the basis of Jesus' own religious experience, we can say that his obedience as the "Suffering Servant" was a satisfaction to God and that the suffering that it entailed was

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4. W.A. Smart, The Contemporary Christ, p. 168.

5. F.W. Dillistone, The Significance of the Cross, p. 193.

6. W.R. Matthews, God in Christian Experience, p. 65.

vicarious, for he was bearing the sins of men just as God himself bears them. But we are not justified in saying that his obedience was vicarious or that his suffering was a satisfaction. In the words of Schleiermacher, "The sufferings of Christ were vicarious, but they did not make satisfaction; the obedience of Christ was satisfaction, but it was not vicarious."[7]

Jesus Christ revealed to men that their achievement of moral righteousness would be the fulfilment of God's will for them. This was the end for which they were made; their ability to realise this high value in their lives was the distinguishing mark of their spiritual nature. But its realisation required love capable of vicarious suffering. "And so, in the last resort, that which Jesus did for us is the work not of man in his own right of manhood, but of God, taking manhood, that He might fulfill therein His eternal purpose for man."[8]

It is evident that in our approach to the Atonement the life and teaching of Jesus are vital empirical data. The intensity of his own religious experience and the depth of the love which he bore to men led him

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7. Quoted in, Douglas Clyde Macintosh, Theology as an Empirical Science, p. 167.

8. L.W. Grensted, The Person of Christ, p. 266.

to strive to win them to that same experience of God. But obviously they could know that experience only if their sin had been conquered, that block which prevented their realizing the destiny of their divine sonship. And this was the aim of both his life and his teachings. He was trying to persuade men to surrender their lives to a God of holy love. He was not content to stand before them as an example; he was making every effort to change their hearts. But it was their hearts, not God's, that he would change.

> He did not feel called to reconcile God to the world in its sin. His priestly function was moral and rational. It was to change man rather than God, to win men to repentance and faith, and thereby to forgiveness and reconciliation - at-one-ment - with God.[9]

Surely one thing stands out in Jesus' teaching: God is more than willing to grant men free forgiveness of sin. The only thing that can be construed as a preliminary requirement is that they love their fellowmen and forgive them likewise. But this requirement is obviously necessary that their hearts may be ready to receive the forgiveness of God; it is in no sense a judicial satisfaction to God. In the Lord's Prayer, in the answer to Peter when he asked

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9. Macintosh, op. cit., p. 130.

how many time he should forgive his brother who sinned against him, and in the Sermon on the Mount, these two emphasises are made clear: the Father forgives without limit and without qualification the man who is possessed of a forgiving spirit himself, and there is no limit to the love with which God showers his children.[10] Here is forgiveness which, though freely given, does no violence to the moral law, for the very act of forgiveness creates a new reverence for moral righteousness. "Perhaps the most important contribution of the teachings of Jesus is that they never allow us to escape the ethical demands of God or to forget how central is the love that does not turn away from human need."[11] Man is cheered by the assurance that God seeks the sinner as a shepherd seeks his lost sheep, but he is sobered also by the realisation that God expects a like love and sense of responsibility on the part of men for men. Sin while it remains is a barrier between man and God, but if God is at all Christ-like, it is obvious that he longs to forgive it that man be restored to his presence and realise to the full the life of the spirit.[12]

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10. Dillistone, op.cit., p. 105

11. John Bennett, Christian Realism, p. 131

12. Edwin Lewis, Jesus Christ and the Human Quest, pp. 166-7

The meaning and purpose of the Incarnation in terms of atonement now becomes clear. The immanent power of God, the nisus which produces the progressive development in his creation, became even more immanent, acted upon men more powerfully, that this final obstacle to the full development of spirit might be overcome. How this was accomplished in Christ we must now consider.

The Atonement which Jesus accomplished for man was not begun and finished on Calvary. To discover his full significance we must consider the atoning aspect of his life as well as of his death, for his death upon the Cross only brought to a climax the principles by which he lived his life.[13] He looked upon his teaching, his words of forgiveness, and his healing as part of his whole effort to conquer the spiritual and bodily ills of men and lead them into a life of righteousness toward their fellows and loyalty to God. And the result of that whole effort was that, " . . he broke the power of sin, suffering, and death to corrupt and cow men's souls; and he let loose into the world a great torrent of divine life,

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13. Floyd V. Filson, One Lord-One Faith, p. 156

love, and power, which is bound in the end to sweep away all obstacles before its onrush."[14] It was in a send the problem of breaking a vicious circle. Evil customs seem to reproduce themselves in society, as in an individual, and grow more automatic each time they are followed. Against such a system only the sensitive souls, who are capable of suffering vicariously for the guilty, are able to react and produce a change. It was the distinction of Jesus that he was sensitive to every habit, attitude, and act which was a violation of the spirit of love toward God and man. "By a transcendent exertion of the will- a will of perfect love Godward and manward- he broke the force of the world's sinful habit and made it possible for us to follow through the breach that he made."[15] Convinced as he was of the rightness of the law of love, he knew also that anyone who would live by that law in this world must suffer as a result of the world's sin. There have been other men who have taught high ethical standards; there have been other men who suffered; but here was a man who would suffer the utmost for the highest good.

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14. Walter Marshall Horton, Realistic Theology. p.135

15. Stead, The Deed and the Doom of Jesus, pp. 44,45; Quoted in Horton, op. cit., p.136

Turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, giving the additional cloak, all these pointed the way which led ultimately to the agony of the cross. "It was an adventure of loving unselfishness showing how far love would go to secure the willing response even of those who were unworthy."[16] Here was redemptive love in action, and the challenge which it made to men came to a climax in his death. Without it we would have his teaching and the principle by which he lived as a theory. But only his death could guarantee the utter reality of that principle in his life. And only the resurrection and the enduring Christian community could assure us of the victorius power which belongs to that way of life in a moral universe.

We can say that the Atonement is first an effective revelation of God's redeeming love which is able to forgive a man his past sins and which is ever seeking to free his will from sin, that he may be insured against its power in the future.[17] But it is more than that. It is also a judgment upon the man who fails to respond.

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16. Lynn Harold Hugh, "The Incarnation", in Contemporary Thinking About Jesus, p. 284.

17. John Baillie, The Place of Jesus Christ in Modern Christianity, p. 172

Judgment is inherent in true love. As Henry Nelson Wieman has so ably developed the subject,[18] this is the mark of true love as compared with mere sentimentality. Sentimentality glosses over the imperfections of the object of its affection, but real love sees them as a threat to the character of the beloved, and helps to overcome them. True love is able to see the most dangerous defects of the beloved when he is at his best, and likewise is able to see evidence of his best when he is at his worst. In short, love creates a realistic picture of the beloved, striving all the while to help him bring out the best that is in him. Such is the love of God which is displayed in Jesus Christ, and such is the love which God must have if he is to retain his moral character. If we attribute mere sentimental love to God, the Gospel is deprived of its saving power and in its stead comes the unrealistic teaching that we are all getting better and better every day and that we will be in the heavenly city before we know it, almost in spite of our own motives and desires.[19] A single glance at the ghastly scene which our world presents will convince us of the utter folly of such a belief.

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18. Henry Nelson Wieman, Religious Experience and the Scientific Method, Chap. IV.

19. W.A. Smart, op. cit., pp. 403-404.

It was the love of Jesus for his fellow men which opened his eyes to their weakness and kindled his anger against their hypocrisy. His very life, revealing the ideal of moral perfection, passed judgment upon all who came in contact with him. As an exquisite picture placed in the midst of cheap imitations judges all the others, so his life passed judgment upon the personal and corporate sins of his contemporaries. But his judgment was more than indirect. He openly associated with the notoriously immoral, whose humble hearts he had found ready to receive the forgiving love of God. But the proud he subdued with his biting irony. When the proud spirit of the Pharisee would not humble itself and seek the fellowship of God, Jesus openly denounced him. He was definitely a realist; he recognized the power of sin and evil, and he knew that many would reject the good. And he was sure that God would act accordingly. "There was no hesitation and there was no evasion. In the ultimate universe Almighty God would use the grimmest and sternest force to deal with those recalcitrant persons who made evil their good and turned from every outreach of the love of God."[20] Jesus' teaching, as well as the failure of his life when considered from a worldly point of view, were a pronouncement of divine judgment upon the world. Above

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20. Lynn Harold Hugh, op. cit., p. 234.

all, in the Cross itself, is displayed the power of sin, standing in direct opposition to the love of God.

> The sins of men actually crucified Jesus - the sins of the Jewish Sanhedrin, which were jealousy and prejudice, the sin of Peter who denied Him, the sin of Pontius Pilate, who found injustice easier than justice, the sin of the Roman soldiers, who added mocking to his scourging and crucifixion. These are our sins as much as theirs - jealousy, prejudice, disloyalty, time-serving, pitilessness - though the consequences are not so clearly seen, when we are the sinners. 21

Indeed, they are the sins which any man can produce when he abuses the freedom with which God has endowed him.

We might despair of solving this antinomy of God's love in Christ, on the one hand, and the abject sin of man, on the other hand, if it were not for the realistic character of that love, as pointed out above. The love of God has been aptly compared to the love of a father for his children. The father does not love his child for everything that he does, but in spite of many of his actions. And he is guided in his relations with that child by a desire to have him conform to a certain standard of achievement. As C.S. Lewis sums it up in The Problem of Pain, "Love can never be reconciled to an unlovely object." 22

But the justice of God is not like the justice of men;

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21. H. Wheeler Robinson, Suffering Human and Divine, p. 65.

22. Quoted in Dillistone, op. cit., p. 204.

it is not content to recognize sin and condemn it. Our justice is retaliatory and punitive; God's is redemptive. And therefore it can conquer the sin which it condemns.

Sin is conquered, partly at least, through the persuasive appeal of the Cross. The only requirement for the forgiveness of God, as we stated before, is the desire for forgiveness which naturally issues in a forgiving heart and a spirit of repentance. But actually the grace of forgiveness precedes that change of heart and inspires it in men. "Herein is God's love made manifest, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Atonement is not the response of God to the effort of man; God begins the action. We may be accused at this point of propounding a "subjective" view of the Atonement which is lacking in power. But I protest that this aspect of the Atonement is as objective as any other. In the life and death of Jesus, God has not only displayed his redeeming love to mankind, he has also made it an effective force in their lives. And when that force wins a man to repentance, the challenge of the Cross tells him what his sin has cost God and drives him to his knees in a humble dedication to a new life.

And this persuasive, redemptive love is creative

of ever growing power. For regardless of theories as to the origin of the Church, it is obvious that without Jesus Christ it would never have come into being. As a result of the Atonement, God became more immanent in the world, his power acted more directly upon the soul of man: surely the Church is one concrete way in which this was accomplished. For the Church continues the work of Christ in at least three ways:

> (1) The Church . . makes the life of God more and more immanent and actual in human life.
>
> (2) The Church continues the work . . of bringing new power and forgiveness to individuals who are bound in the fetters of evil habit.
>
> (3) The Church continues the work which led him to his Cross, that of defying and breaking the power of evil social institutions. 23

If the Incarnation is truly the incursion anew of the power of God into the world, then we must look for some evidence that the life Jesus was creating in men, and the standard of love which he was holding before them have persisted. And the persistance of that life and of that standard are to be found in the Christian people. We need not blind ourselves to the weakness of the Church, and to its failure to live up to the high standard of Jesus Christ. But when these have

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23. Horton, op. cit., p. 142

been taken into account, the fact remains that it alone has been an effective force in society bearing witness to the redeeming love of God in Christ. Sometimes it has fallen low, at other times it has risen to the heights; but no other institution or group of people has done the thing that it has done. Surely it is playing a role in the redemptive work of God begun in the historic Jesus.

It seems to me that Walter Horton has found the kernel of truth in the older so-called "objective" theories of the Atonement. For, even though we reject the un-Christian idea that God was somehow "bought off" on Calvary, the fact remains that in the life and death of Jesus, something was done "once and for all." There was an objective quality to this act in the history of the relations of God and man. As Horton puts it:

> . . . . in and through the crucifixion of Christ God has performed a hard and costly Deed which makes his love newly accessible, and makes the world permanently different for those who, coming within the radius of influence of the Deed, respond to it affirmatively. God in Christ has made saving, sacrificial contact with the world's burden of iniquity: while continuing to repel and oppose it by His holiness, and expose its' exceeding sinfulness' by the ghastly horrors it inflicts on His Holy One.24

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24. Horton, Our Eternal Contemporary, op., 76-7

Horton may mean more by this statement than my interpretation would include, but certainly it can be understood to include the moral forces which were released through Christ; the example of his life, his perfect conformity to the will of God, his revelation of the cost of sin, and the power of the redeeming love which he brought into the world to turn men's hearts and transform their lives. "Thus Jesus marks the point in history at which it becomes possible for men to adopt consciously as his own purpose the purpose which is already inherent in his nature."[25] This event has all the objectivity of an impact upon history which changes both the course and the destiny of that history.

And the results of this impact on history are primary empirical data for the Christ who not only died on Calvary, but also triumphed over that death and whose spirit lives today and causes the hearts of those who follow him to "burn within them." For the Atonement he wrought for them brings not only salvation from sin, but also a new-found power in closer fellowship with God. It has enabled missionaries to suffer martyrdom, it has inspired the righteous to take upon them the suffering and shame entailed by the sin of the ignorant and the rebellious, it has been

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25. John Macmurray, The Clue to History, p. 55; Quoted in Bennett, op. cit., p. 134.

the secret of untold acts of self-sacrifice, freely undertaken for the sake of other human beings, and it has sought for "no reward save knowing that we do thy will".[26] The creation of Christ-like character is an objective fact made possible only by an objective, moral Atonement.

We have been considering the manward significance of the fact of Atonement. Before concluding, we might say a word about the Godward significance of that act.

It was stated in Chapter V that in the combination of life and spirit (which is man) a new stage of reality is reached, which is marked by the ability of persons to appreciate and live for values. From the point of view of the Creator, this fact has tremendous significance. For if we are right in our thesis that the end of the creative process is the realisation of value, supremely moral righteousness, it follows that in man God has created a being who can understand what God is doing and even have a part in the work himself. And the final end of the creative process will be realised only when man is able perfectly to understand the values of God and give himself to them completely. This will be the fulfillment of redemption, "the establishment of the filial relation, or

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26. Dillistone, op. cit., pp. [illegible], for a development of these themes.

man's realisation of sonship to God."[27] But this end cannot be achieved apart from the freedom of man, for his freedom is a necessary element in his moral character. None of the higher values of life are appreciated by command, but by the response of a free spirit. And in bestowing that gift, God is sharing his eternal enterprise with men.

> Beauty has no power to compel those who are persistently blind to her lovliness. The issues of a better society win no aid from those who are wilfully deaf to their appeal. The cause of honor and justice and the good life for mankind suffers defeat from those who will not trust truth. So also with the living God himself. Through all these means and more directly and immediately he is forever making his appeal to men's devotion. But it lies fully within their power not only to deny the gifts but to deny the reality of the giver. There is a gracious restraint in the exercise of the divine constraint. 28

In the denial of the supreme value of God, man finds only futility and sorrow, but the possibility of his denial remains a fact. Our anthropocentric point of view has fastened our attention on our own problem of evil, but viewed from the other side, it must offer something of a problem to God also.

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27. Lewis op. cit., p. 174.

28. Henry Fitney Van Dusen, The Plain Man Seeks For God, p. 171

To my mind, the inevitable conclusion of this line of reasoning is the possibility of God. The sufferings of Christ upon Calvary were caused, as we saw, by man's sin, the sin which was made possible only by his freedom. And the only way Christ could redeem them from that sin was by vicariously-suffering love. This was the only redemption that love could bring. And if God has been revealed by Christ, if he is indeed a God of love, then then he must suffer likewise. "They sin and suffer, and because they cannot be redeemed from their sin and suffering by the mere exercise of power God suffers with them. . . The principle of atonement is thus planted in the very heart of God."[29]

To say this does not imply an external limitation upon God. For the cause of his suffering is the limitation he has placed upon himself in the creation of free beings. "It will be the suffering which springs from moral, not from physical, necessity, the suffering of holiness, choosing to suffer, such suffering as we see in Jesus."[30]

What is the relation of this suffering of God to the suffering on the Cross? On Calvery's Cross Christ won a victory by transforming the sin which produced it into the means of grace which issued in the redemption. It is "the

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29. Albert C. Knudson, The Doctrine of Redemption, p. 386.

30. H. Wheeler Robinson, Suffering Human and Divine, p.130.

instrumental center of historical redemption." [31] and it holds that position because it is part of the eternal victory over evil. Just as Jesus did not wait for the penitence of men but won them to it by his redeeming, suffering love, so the grace of God's forgiveness precedes any sign from men.

> It is wrought by God for man, whether on earth or in heaven; but it is also wrought by God in Himself, since it springs from his own nature, and must be a victory of grace and for Himself, since the sinful history of the human race is his intimate concern. . . . the Godward relation of the historical atonement will be that it actualizes in time the eternal reality of God's saving purpose, not only by actually bringing men to penitence, but also by actually transforming the values of history. [32]

Here then is the great assurance of the Atonement. History cannot get out of hand. Just as the penitent sinner can be transformed by the redeeming love of God found on Calvary's Cross, so God himself by the exercise of that power alone, which is supreme in the universe, will fulfill the prayer, "Thy Kingdom Come."

This is the Atonement in terms of its Godward significance. But as men we behold it in the Cross of Christ. It is there that we look for its meaning; above all it is there that we face its challenge. And I believe that it is

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31. Ibid., p. 170.

32. Ibid., p. 171

in that challenge that we discover the most fundamental meaning of the Atonement.

> The Crucifixion of Jesus confronts the soul of man with a searching dilemma, with the necessity of finally making up his mind. For it means one of two things. Either it means that that sort of believing about God, that sort of living, even when it is at its maximal point of purity and devotion, is so fantastically false, so utterly wide of the truth, that it cannot stand up to the forces which actually dominate the world, but is doomed to be stamped out by them - which is exactly what powerful leaders and teachers in the world today are saying. Or, on the other hand, it means that it is so firmly grounded in fact, that it can afford to accept seemingly utter defeat, knowing that the the victory, God's victory, is in the end with it. . . the Crucifixion of Jesus is either a great, grim, hoarse, derisive shout of No to the proposition that God is love . . . or it is a firm, steady, undefeated Yes. . . The conviction that stirs deep within a man's heart and mind, that he cannot, he must not, he dare not, join in that . . shout of No is only possible because God has put Christ and the Cross into the world . . . and the challenge of the Cross . . . either to believe in and committ oneself to the God of Jesus Christ, or to conclude that human existence is in fact what on the surface it most certainly appears to be, namely . . . a meaningless waste of effort and suffering, ending in a silence of universal death. 33

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33. Herbert H. Farmer, Toward A Belief in God, pp.124,125; Quoted in Dillistone, op. cit., pp. 229-30.

We may say that the atoning work of the Incarnation was threefold:

1. A example of the God-way, proof that the highest moral ambitions of man, as expressed in suffering love, are clues to the reality of the universe and will ultimately triumph over evil.

2. Condemnation of the way of sin which brought about the Crucifixion and a challenge to men to unite with God in the conquest of that way.

3. And something more; the establishment of a closer, more intimate relation between God and man. The power of God has become available to man in the pursuit of values which were always upheld by God but which were previously only dimly perceived by men.

In the life and death of Jesus something was accomplished which was definite and final. God and men entered into a new relationship. In the words of Walter Horton, "God got inside humanity as never before. . . . and from that time on God was less transcendent and more immanent, less potential and more actual in his world than He had ever been.[34] A new power was released in the world which is still available to the man who commits himself to a life of self-surrender based upon divinely sanctioned values. We can still say with St. Paul that,

> God was in Christ reconciling
> the world to himself.

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34. Walter Marshal Horton, op. cit., pp 139-40

CHAPTER VII

AN EMPIRICAL CHRISTOLOGY

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Now we must draw the threads of our investigation together. We set out to categorize a religious experience: such is the task of theology. Our particular religious experience is that represented by Jesus Christ, both as an historic personality and also as a dynamic religious and moral force in the lives of men. Our method we declared to be empirical - gathering data from experience, formulating concepts and hypotheses on the basis of the data, and finally proceeding to rational inferences after the concepts have been tested. This appears to be the method best designed to meet the tests of a scientific approach to theology and also to do full justice to the religious fact.

It is evident that theology, like any other discipline, must have a starting point; it requires certain presuppositions in order that it may get its sense of direction. For Christian theism, the primary presupposition is that human life finds its meaning in terms of value, i.e., its relation to the creative process of God. Empiricism further affirms that value can be discovered in what has been termed 'natural' experience.

On the basis of this method and these presuppositions, we proceeded to our investigation of the problem of Christology: how Jesus Christ realised divine values in a human situation, and the implications of his achievement for his relationship to God and to man.

Our first step was to analyze the experience of Jesus as an historic personality. We concluded that through the use of the only intellectual categories known to him, those of his own time and culture, he taught and lived a new value, hitherto only imperfectly understood or realised in human life. He saw that in this morally grounded universe of God, he who would be truly great must be ready to serve and to suffer, must be willing to love unreservedly for the sake of others. All this is the primary data of direct experience.

To gain perspective on the achievement of Jesus, we went to those interpretors of the findings of science who see the history of the world and of men in terms of an emergent development which culminates in spirit, the highest grade of reality, which is characterized by the ability to appreciate value. In the moments of his most complete devotion to value, man is aware of his own

spiritual nature, above all when he devotes himself to the value of moral righteousness and accepts the suffering love which it entails.

To fit this data into the theistic picture, we postulated God both as the creative nisus and also as the source of that value which is the ultimate goal of his creation- in theological terms, God immanent and God transcendent. The value of moral righteousness, which should issue in the beloved community, is of God, as is also the creative drive toward the attaining of that goal.

Man as spirit has not only the ability to appreciate the values of God, but also the ability to accept or reject them. The final completion of the creation of God depends upon the cooperation of men. For by sin man can turn to lesser goals or he can utilize the insights which he gains into reality to glorify himself. Thus sin is the obstacle which must be overcome before the values of God can be actualized.

The achievement of Jesus consisted in his conquest of this very obstacle. By the perfectness of his insight into a moral universe- and hence his understanding of relationships within a hierarchy of values- and by his utter devotion to the highest, Jesus stands as a new emergent in God's creation.

As spirit is marked off from the other grades of reality by its ability to appreciate value, so the distinguishing mark of Jesus is the union within his character of the ultimate divine value and the achieving of that value. Consequently, we say that God was in Christ, we speak of his life as the Incarnation.

But this perfection of Jesus was creative as well as new; he was the pioneer of a way in which others could follow. His life released the moral power of God into the world with a new effectiveness. And that power is still felt in the lives of those who follow him, felt in terms of Atonement- of bringing them to oneness with God

The deepest meanings of life are difficult of expression in prose terms. This handicap is felt keenly by a writer in any field of theology. But fortunately a pioneer in the field of empiricism, who could write more than prose, considered the problem which has occupied this author, and wrote the following lines. They catch the notes of humility and of victory, of Crucifixion and Resurrection, which are vital to an understanding of the act wrought by God in Jesus Christ.

Alone thou goest forth, O lord,
  In sacrifice to die;
Is this thy sorrow naught to us
  Who pass unheeding by?

Our sins, not thine, thou bearest, Lord,
  Make us thy sorrow feel,
Till through our pity and our shame
  Love answers love's appeal.

This is earth's darkest hour, but thou
  Dost light and life restore;
Then let all praise be given thee
  Who livest evermore.

Give us compassion for thee, Lord,
  That as we share this hour,
Thy cross may bring us to thy joy
  And resurrection power.

Peter Abelard, 1079-1142;
Translated by F. Bland Tucker, 1938;

Quoted from The Hymnal of The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America (1940).

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